

AND YET THEY ARE POOR: A NATURALISTIC STUDY OF RURAL POVERTY  
AND THE WORKING POOR PEOPLE OF APPALACHIAN OHIO

DISSERTATION

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By

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## DEDICATION

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena,  
whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood,  
who knows the great enthusiasms,  
the great devotions,  
and spends himself in a worthy cause;  
who at best,  
if he wins,  
knows the thrills of high achievement,  
and, if he fails,  
at least he fails daring greatly,  
so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls  
who know neither victory or defeat.

--THEODORE ROOSEVELT

To my father and friend:

Ralph W. Greenlee

Robert M. Ryan

...their spirit lives on.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction

Social work has historically shown concern for the poor of our society. In fact, it "began as a movement to ameliorate poverty and injustice..." (Dean, 1977, p. 370). As a profession social work supported the poor in their quest for social equality and distributive justice. Unfortunately, the needs of the poor are just as great today as they have ever been. This study focuses on the working poor of Appalachian Ohio. They are a group of poor people who have been neglected by policy makers and researchers. They live in an area of the country that has received little attention since the demise of the war on poverty, and they have had little opportunity to give voice to their needs and concerns. A 29 year old carpet cleaner who earns poverty level income states:

You didn't know the way I have to live unless you came around to do this survey. These people...politicians, the President, they don't live in our shoes. If they lived in our shoes for even just six weeks I think they would look at things differently.

The following is a naturalistic study of the working poor of Appalachian Ohio that provides the reader with the opportunity to "live in the shoes" of people who work, but struggle to survive on poverty level wages.

### Significance of the Problem

Caputo (1989) states that "the working poor constitute the fastest growing segment of the poverty population..." (p. 89). A greater proportion of the working poor live in rural areas than urban areas (Shapiro and Greenstein, 1989) and most of the poor families in rural areas contain at least one worker (64.6%), while nearly one-fourth (23.4%) have two workers in the family (Porter, 1989). Despite their efforts to actively participate in the work force, these individuals earn poverty level income and in many cases find themselves making less (after transfers) than those people who live on welfare (Ellwood, 1988). Seventy-two percent of the children in poor rural families have at least one adult who is working (O'Hare, 1988). O'Hare (1988) states, "One has to wonder what message these children get when they see their parents remain in poverty despite the fact that they are working" (p. 11).

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the lives and experiences of a group of Appalachian rural working poor individuals; to ascertain the reasons why they are poor; to better understand the social and psychological effects of poverty on the working poor; and to determine the social support system and survival strategies they utilize to live on poverty level income.

### Pilot Study

Many authors (Locke, Spirduso and Silverman, 1987; Marshal and Rossman, 1989) recommend the use of pilot studies to assist the researcher in more accurately determining beforehand specific aspects of a qualitative study. Locke et al. (1987) believe that a pilot study enables the researcher to establish the following: the initial focus, study site, sources of information and to conduct some preliminary data analysis. They believe in

the value of developing a proposal around "concrete experiences rather than speculation" (Locke et al., 1987, p. 91).

From June through August of 1989, the researcher conducted a pilot study of the working poor in Appalachian Ohio. He interviewed 8 working poor persons, along with five members of their families, for an N of 13. In addition, two providers of services to the working poor, five welfare women, one unemployed young man and a poor family with a disabled worker were interviewed to obtain a better overall picture of rural poverty in the community. The researcher spent several days "scouting" the countryside, talking to residents of all kinds, twice helped out at a rural soup kitchen, and spent the day with two working poor families. In all, the researcher conducted 13 in-depth interviews that lasted from 2 to 3 hours each, which resulted in 200 pages of transcribed notes.

The purpose of this study was to explore the problems of implementing a full scale qualitative study of the working poor in Appalachian Ohio and to describe some preliminary findings about the condition of the working poor. This pilot study also enabled the researcher to determine a focus for the dissertation; establish a study site; work out the problems of gaining entry into a rural Appalachian community; develop sampling procedures; and collect and analyze data. Most importantly, this study enabled the researcher to develop a set of research questions to focus the dissertation work.

### Research Questions

The dissertation focused on the following research questions which emerged from the data collected during the pilot study:

- 1) What do working poor people perceive to be the causes of their poverty? From their perspective, does the culture of poverty or the structural/opportunity theory of poverty provide a better explanation of their situation? Or do they see other factors that promote poverty among the working poor population?
- 2) What are the social and psychological effects of poverty on the working poor and their families?

- 3) What are the social and financial supports that working poor people utilize to live on a limited income?
- 4) What survival strategies have working poor people developed to continue to live on poverty level income?
- 5) What are the barriers that prevent the working poor from exiting poverty?
- 6) What are the personal, social, economic and/or political changes that working poor people believe will have to be made to improve their quality of life?

### Definition of Terms

#### Naturalistic Study

Patton (1990) defines naturalistic study as "Studying real world situations as they unfold naturally; non-manipulative, unobtrusive, and non-controlling; openness to whatever emerges--lack of predetermined constraints on outcomes" (p. 40).

#### Poverty

"Poverty can be defined as insufficient resources for an 'adequate' standard of living" (Levitan, 1990, p.1). However, it is difficult to determine an "adequate standard of living" and "there is no universally accepted definition of basic needs" (Levitan, 1990, p.1). For the purposes of this study, the Federal Poverty Index was used to determine which individuals were poor. The Federal Poverty Index was developed by the Social Security Administration in 1964 based on a 1955 Agricultural Department survey "that estimated the cost of an economy food plan for a four-member family with two school-age children at \$2.78 per person per day (1989 prices)" (Levitan, 1990, p.1). The Agricultural Department estimated that families of 3 or more people spend approximately one-third of their income on food and the poverty level was set at three times the cost of food expenses (Levitan, 1990). The Federal Poverty Index is an absolute, rather than relative measure of

poverty. For example, a family of four with an annual income of \$12, 100 was considered<sup>5</sup> to be officially poor in 1989, while the same size family that earned \$12, 101 was not considered to be poor, despite the fact that there was little difference between these two families' standard of living (CEOGC, 1989). Despite these limitations, the Federal Poverty Index was used as a criteria in selecting participants for this study (See Appendix A for a table of the current Federal Poverty Index Guidelines established by the federal government based on family size).

### Working Poor

In this study, the working poor were defined as "members of households in which the wage earners work part time or full time during the year but still have incomes below the poverty line..." (Whitman, 1988, p. 19).

### Appalachian Ohio

The passage of the Appalachian Regional Development Act of 1965 (ARDA) officially created a governmentally defined region known as Appalachia. This mountainous region consists of 397 counties in 13 states that extends from New York to Alabama (Appalachian Regional Commission, 1985). Twenty-eight of the 88 counties of Ohio located in the southeastern section of the state are designated by the federal government as part of the Appalachian region. During the course of this study, an additional county was added to this group increasing the total number of Appalachian counties in Ohio to 29 (See Appendix B for a map of the Ohio Appalachian counties).



### Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). These authors state that it:

...is inductively derived from the study of the phenomena it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in a reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory and then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge (p. 23).

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

A review of the literature reveals a sporadic interest in the working poor as a population for study. They are frequently overlooked when it comes to the development of new program and policy initiatives (Shapiro and Greenstein, 1989). This literature review examines the characteristics of working poor persons and the nature of their problem; reviews the theories that influence our thinking about poverty; discusses the causes of working people's poverty; traces the historical response to the needs of the working poor; critiques the limited research in this area; and calls for further inquiry.

#### Characteristics of the Working Poor

The majority of working poor people living in rural areas are white males in their prime working years (Shapiro and Greenstein, 1989). Two-thirds of the rural working poor are employed in three occupational categories: services, farming/forestry, and as operators/laborers (Shapiro, 1989). Many of their jobs are characterized by a large amount of turnover, low morale, poor training and limited opportunities for advancement (Levitan and Shapiro, 1987). In this labor market the "workers usually lack clout...and are heavily dependent on government policies for improvement in their employment situation" (Levitan and Shapiro, 1987, p.6). When compared with the poor who do not work, the working poor encounter shorter periods of poverty. However, they nevertheless "experience long periods of economic deprivation" (Levitan and Shapiro, 1987, p. 16).

### Nature and Scope of the Problem

Shapiro and Greenstein (1989) report that in 1987, it was estimated that two-million people worked full-time year round but remained poor and another six and one-half million worked on a part-time basis and remained in poverty. In the past 10 years, the total number of poor people working full-time year round has increased by 562,000 people. This was a 28 percent increase in the number of working poor people (Shapiro and Greenstein, 1989). In addition, a growing number of young adults living in rural areas are poor (12%), despite being employed (O'Hare, 1988).

### Theories of Poverty

The theories of poverty typically explain its existence as being caused by either attitudinal or structural/opportunity factors (Duncan and Tickamyer, 1988; Kane, 1987). The implications for this kind of dichotomous thinking is that the development of poverty theory becomes fragmented and polarized into two camps. Each camp offering a perspective that explains poverty in some situations but lacks sufficient depth to describe rural poverty in all its real world complexity. Theories of poverty have a tendency to "blame the victim" or "blame the system." They are micro or macro in their orientation. And the transactions that occur between these two parts of the system are overlooked.

The individual, more micro oriented theories view poverty as being caused by individual deficits. Poor people are believed to have a value system that significantly differs from the mainstream middle class which prevents them from competing for jobs in the larger society, or they have personal deficits such as an inadequate education, lack of work skills or insufficient work experience. In addition, these people may also have personal problems such as mental illness or substance abuse that makes them incapable of working a full time job.

The systemic theories of poverty focus primarily on the macro causes of the problem. The macro forces of the system are believed to cause poverty through a shortage

of quality jobs, low wages, discrimination, international competition, and the growth of the use of part-time labor in the retail and service sectors of the economy. The political economic system may also restrict economic opportunity for poor people due to a lack of social, economic and political power.

This dichotomous thinking has plagued poverty research and theory development for many years. Studies based on models that explain poverty as being caused by individual or system factors; micro or macro causes, fail to address the process by which people become poor and remain in that condition. Poverty theory has subsequently been unsuccessful in explaining the relationship that occurs between the individual and the environment. Our understanding of poverty continues to be limited in its scope and the programs developed that are based on one theory or the other fail to adequately address the complexities of poverty. Consequently, poverty programs work for some people in some situations, but many times lack the ability to respond to different people with unique needs in a changing political and economic environment. Poverty theory has not been able to explain the relationship of the person in the environment and the critical transactions that occur between the two forces that may promote the continued growth of poverty in the United States. These limited perspectives of poverty have controlled the kinds of studies that have been conducted, the questions asked, the answers obtained, and the kinds of poverty programs ultimately developed and implemented to solve the problem. In some ways, poverty theory's lack of sophistication has restricted the alternatives available to researchers, policy makers and practitioners working to solve this serious problem.

### Culture of Poverty Theory

This attitudinal theory of poverty views people as poor because of personal deficiencies which prevent them from obtaining suitable employment that would allow them to escape poverty. The poor are believed to develop a value system that is inconsistent with middle class culture. These values are believed to be passed on from generation to

generation via the family members and the situation becomes self-perpetuating. This attitudinal view, better known as the culture of poverty theory, was first postulated by Oscar Lewis (1966) and has become the dominant understanding of poverty and policy development in recent years (Katz, 1989; Lewis, 1983).

The culture of poverty theory ascertains that Appalachians are a subculture that have a set of beliefs, attitudes and values that prevent them from achieving the goals of middle class America. In response to the harsh economic conditions of Appalachia, Weller (1965) states that Appalachians develop a set of "adaptational" coping patterns which result in the establishment of character traits. These character traits consist of the following: individualism, traditionalism, fatalism, no saving or budgeting, present time orientation, no status seeking, lack of long range goals, detachment from work, ambivalence towards education, and a fear of the well-educated. All of these traits make it difficult for the Appalachian to compete in a middle class world.

The culture of poverty theory has been criticized for "blaming the victim" (Ryan, 1965) for their condition and failing to recognize the need for changes in the political/economic system (Katz, 1989; Lewis, 1983; Valentine, 1968). The solution to poverty utilizing the culture of poverty model is to change the values of the Appalachian people (Lewis, 1983) and to seek individual solutions such as education and job training. This theory fails to consider the systemic causes of poverty which are prevalent throughout the Appalachian region.

#### Structural/Opportunity Theory

Structural/opportunity theory argues that there are not enough jobs that provide workers with enough hours and income to lift themselves out of poverty. Poverty is caused by situational factors such as a shortage of jobs, inadequate salaries, lack of appropriate education and work skills, or discrimination in the work place (Duncan and Tickamyer, 1988; Kane, 1987; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1987). These structural causes of

poverty are beyond the control of the individual and are prompted by macro, systemic forces in the political/economic structure of our capitalistic system. Many authors feel that structural/opportunity theory is a more accurate way to explain the prevalence of poverty (Fitchen, 1981; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1987). Tomaskovic-Devey (1987, p. 71) argues that "efforts to reduce or eliminate poverty by upgrading human capital or changing the cultural values of the presently poor are unlikely to eradicate poverty in the absence of structural change" because there aren't enough good paying jobs available.

Duncan and Tickamyer (1988) contend that rural poverty research has focused too much on the dichotomy of the structural/opportunity and culture of poverty explanations of poverty. They believe that there are strengths in both theories. The structural theory of poverty delineates the role of the economic and political forces in promoting a lack of opportunity in local and regional labor markets. The culture of poverty theory recognizes how situational factors can effect the ability of the poor to respond even in situations where job opportunities exist in the community. Duncan and Tickamyer (1988, p. 251) state, "The first task of revitalizing poverty research is to reformulate poverty theory beyond the ideological trap inherent in the narrow culture of poverty model." It is argued that situational factors are the primary force that causes poverty in rural America and that the lack of opportunity causes the development of a culture of poverty (Duncan and Tickamyer, 1988; Fitchen, 1981). The character traits proposed by Weller (1965) are adaptations to social conditions caused by a limited opportunity structure in the community in which the poor live.

Fitchen (1981) has identified 10 causes of rural poverty that are evenly divided into primary and derivative forces. The primary causes are the political economic forces such as: 1) the continuing impact of history; 2) the crippling economic situation; 3) inadequacies of the social structure; 4) barriers to upward mobility; and 5) the corrosive stereotypes. This author believes that these socioeconomic factors are the primary cause of rural poverty. The continuing impact of history has prompted the development of generational

poverty in families that results in isolation creating a barrier to improving one's economic situation. The crippling economic situation creates psychosocial stress for poor families which becomes self-perpetuating. The social structure makes it difficult for people to relate to the dominant society and poor families have lost the ability to provide social and financial support to their members. Social mobility is restricted by a changing economy that is characterized by high unemployment rates, low wages, and the need for high technology work skills. Despite efforts to improve their image, poor people face the insurmountable task of attempting to build their self-esteem and improve their reputation in the community, but the stigma of being poor is strong. Many poor people internalize these external stereotypes fostering the development of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The derivative causes of poverty are similar to the character traits of the culture of poverty theory. They are: 1) the constant pressure of too many problems; 2) the difficulty of balancing aspirations and achievements; 3) the failure syndrome; and 4) the closing-in of horizons. Fitchen (1981) writes about the evolution of these secondary or derivative causes of rural poverty:

The derivative causes that perpetuate rural poverty are quite different from the primary causes. I call them derivative, or secondary, because they are results of the five primary causes, results of the destructive effects of poverty on people's lives. Once created, these effects become self-perpetuating, and thus they are also causes of the ongoing cycle of intergenerational poverty. The derivative causes both result from and perpetuate poverty. (p. 192)

While poor people are often criticized for refusing to set long term goals and being self-centered, Fitchen (1981) argues that this apparent "lack of motivation" is in all likelihood an adaptational coping mechanism that allows them to psychologically survive in a world of rejection and limited opportunity. She states:

Poor people consciously and unconsciously regulate their aspirations and their commitment to them. Just as they cannot afford to take financial risks with their limited dollars, so also they cannot afford to take psychological risks with their limited confidence and self-respect. And so they regulate the psychological

resources they commit to a specific, distant goal, often telling themselves that it doesn't really matter if they achieve it. (p. 193)

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In summary, it is recognized that the culture of poverty is a consequence of limited opportunity structures in the rural community, not the primary cause of poverty.

Nevertheless, even when job opportunities do open up in a rural community those people who have suffered chronic, long term poverty, may not be able to respond to these new opportunities in a positive way once the beliefs and attitudes of the local culture are embedded in their personality structure (Caudill, 1963; Duncan and Tickamyer, 1989; Fitchen, 1981).

### Structural Functional Theory

Structural functionalists see society as orderly, stable and held together by shared values and norms (Ritzer, 1988). These theorists view the world in systemic terms, seek equilibrium within the system, and see the world as having mutually interrelated parts (Turner, 1986). There are four propositions to functional theory (Duke, 1976):

- 1) Every society is a relatively persisting configuration of elements.
- 2) Every society is a well-integrated configuration of elements.
- 3) Every element in a society contributes to its functioning.
- 4) Every society rests on the consensus of its members. ( p. 155)

Functionalists conceive of society as having a normative order which is stable and harmonious (Mack, 1965) and they do not concern themselves with conflict over values within society (Turner, 1986).

To the structural functionalist "poverty is functional to the existence of the social structure" (Etzioni, 1976, p. 28). Gans (1972) has written about the positive functions of poverty from a structural functionalist perspective. He argues that poverty must be functional for someone, for if it was dysfunctional to society as a whole, it would not continue to exist. He proposes a set of economic, social, cultural, and political functions that poverty serves to meet the needs of the non poor groups in American society. Gans believes that poverty functions in the following ways: to ensure a low-wage labor pool to



do the "dirty work" in our society; to create jobs for those who serve the poor; to allow the non poor the opportunity to express their altruism; and to guarantee the status of the non poor. In addition, the poor buy goods others do not want; they can be identified as deviants and punished to uphold the legitimacy of society's dominant norms; they can be made to absorb the economic and political costs of social change; and they are less involved in the political process and can be ignored by the upper class. In summary, Gans (1972) reports that his solution to the problem of poverty, though functionalist in perspective, is not unlike that of the conflict theorist. He states:

...social phenomena which are functional for affluent groups and dysfunctional for poor ones persist...and that phenomena like poverty can be eliminated only when they either become sufficiently dysfunctional for the affluent or when the poor can obtain enough power to change the system of stratification. (p. 288)

#### Structural Functionalism and Anomie

To Merton (1957, p. 162) anomie was seen "as a breakdown in the cultural structure, occurring particularly when there is an acute disjunction between the cultural norms and goals and the socially constructed capacities of members of the group to act in accord with them." American culture places a great deal of emphasis on acquiring wealth and achieving the middle class dream of a house with a two-car garage filled with two fine automobiles. However, while American culture sets these high goals, it fails to provide all people in society with the necessary means to attain them. Merton (1957) developed a typology of role behaviors which people assume in an attempt to adapt to the limitations imposed by the social structure of society. The first, and most common mode of individual adaptation, he called conformity. In this mode the individual conforms to both the cultural goals of society and follows the prescribed institutionalized means to attain these goals. The second role behavior he called innovation. Here the individual accepts the cultural goals but has not internalized the institutionalized means as the only way to attain these goals. In the third mode, called ritualism, the individual restricts the aspirations

and goals that they set for themselves, while still maintaining adherence to the institutionalized means to attain them. Merton (1957, p. 150) states, "The theme threaded through these attitudes is that high ambitions invite frustration and danger whereas lower aspirations produce satisfaction and security." In the fourth and least common mode of adaptation, called retreatism, the individual attempts to escape all societal obligations and follow neither its goals or its institutionalized means to attain them. Merton (1957) refers to these people as the "true aliens." For example, these might be people who are homeless, mentally ill or alcoholic. The final form of adaptation he calls rebellion. Merton (1957, p. 155) states that "This adaptation leads men outside the environing social structure to envisage and seek to bring into being a new, that is to say, a great modified social structure. It presupposes alienation in reigning goals and standards."

### Conflict Theory

Dahrendorf (1959) offers an opposing world view in which he delineates the basic tenets of conflict theory:

- 1) Every society is at every point subject to processes of change; social change is ubiquitous.
- 2) Every society displays at every point dissensus and conflict; social conflict is ubiquitous.
- 3) Every element in a society renders contribution to its disintegration and change.
- 4) Every society is based on the coercion of some of its members by others. (p. 162)

The conflict theorist "wants to redirect the focus of inquiry to the phenomena of inequality, power and social conflict" (Weingart, 1969, p. 151). While conflict is recognized as the central focus of conflict theory, it can be argued that power is its real

"core" (Duke, 1976). To the conflict theorist, every society is in a constant process of change. There is dissension within the social system, the elements of society contribute to change, order is brought about by coercion, and the role of power is to maintain order (Ritzer, 1988). Horton (1966) describes the conflict perspective as focusing on "Society as a contested struggle between groups with opposed aims and perspectives" (p. 705). Wallace and Wolf (1980), state that the conflict theorist believes in : 1) the possibility of a utopian society; 2) using social science to criticize society; 3) criticizing the ruling class and the power elite; and 4) using science as a force for change. They believe that objectivity is impossible and that society is clearly divided between the haves and the have nots; the oppressors and the oppressed.

One of the major differences between the structural functionalist and conflict theorist is the primary emphasis on stability or change (Duke, 1976). Structural functionalists seek to maintain the status quo and any deviation from the norms results in the offender being defined as a deviant (Horton, 1966). The conflict theorist questions the legitimacy of the present system's practices and values; the structural functionalist attempts to work within the system by improving opportunities, socialization, education and training programs to enable people to attain success and higher status within the system. They are not interested in changing the basic values of society (Horton, 1966).

The conflict theorist sees deviation from society's norms as resulting from alienation caused by "illegitimate social control and exploitation" ( Etzioni, 1976; Horton, 1966). To the conflict theorist, social control must be fought, the system radically transformed, and revolutionary change must occur for the system to be responsive to oppressed people's needs (Horton, 1966). Poverty under this model is viewed as being inherent in the capitalistic economic and political system, constantly pitting the desires and wants of the bourgeoisie against those of the proletariat (Etzioni, 1976). The conflict theorist believes that it is the responsibility of the social worker to intervene in the oppressive and exploitive political/economic structures of society. Through the use of

social action and advocacy, the social worker seeks to empower the client and transform societal structures so they become more responsive to the needs of minorities and other disadvantaged groups in our society (DeHoyos, 1989).

In summary, within every group, community, or society, "those in dominant positions seek to maintain the status quo while those in subordinate positions seek change" via empowerment, advocacy and social action (Ritzer, 1988, p. 108). Thus, those in dominant positions favor the structural functionalist theory of understanding society. Those who are dominated support the conflict perspective as providing a better understanding of our society and the way it functions. However, it is important to realize that order and conflict co-exist in society (Dahrendorf, 1959). In reality they cannot be understood as separate entities but rather should be viewed as complementary conditions that exist side by side in the day to day structure of society. At various points in time, one or the other may be used to explain a particular social problem and how it impacts on the the social structure or how the social structure influences the social problem.

At this time, the question of why people are poor in rural areas appears to be best explained by conflict theory. For example, rural poverty is typified by a situation where people are poor because they encounter a significant amount of inequality and powerlessness in their lives that limits their access to social, economic and political resources. However, structural functional theory does a better job of explaining how people respond to the condition of poverty. Despite this apparent inequality, many rural poor people do not see themselves as poor and continue to place their trust in the values of the dominant society, seeking to obtain its goals through the traditional means of hard work. They view themselves as part of the system, rather than separate from it and wish to maintain and support the status quo.

Nevertheless, it is this very same system that often fails to reward people who work and promotes inequality and powerlessness through the organization of its political economic system. Conflict theory states that poverty is caused by a capitalistic system that

is insensitive to the needs of poor people. Within this political economic system some people will always benefit at the expense of others through coercion which results in poverty. Order theory (Merton, 1957) describes how poor people respond to a lack of opportunity to achieve the goals of the dominant society which is characterized by cohesion and agreement on values.

Most importantly, the solution to poverty, as Gans (1972) has suggested is similar from both theoretical perspectives. From an order perspective, poverty will have to become dysfunctional for affluent groups before it can be eliminated. From the conflict perspective, the poor will have to organize and obtain enough political power and resources to force the system to change. Both theories support the idea that members of the dominant society will have to be forced to give up some of their power and resources for the system to become more equitable. The differences between these two theories lies in the methods used to pursue this change. A structural functionalist would seek to work within the system and develop mechanisms for adaptation on the part of individuals and their environment. The conflict theorist would seek to empower poor people and force the system to make significant changes in its basic structure to become more responsive to poor people's needs. At different periods of history, both methods have been used to alter the system and make it more responsive to poor people's needs. In the final analysis, poverty cannot be understood without taking into account both the order and conflict models of societal structure. They are intertwined in such a manner that the story of poverty cannot be told, nor understood without utilizing both theories of social structure.

### Conflict Theory and Alienation

Horton (1966, p. 702) states, "Order models imply an anomie theory of societal discontent and an adjustment definition of social deviation. Conflict models imply an alienation theory of discontent and growth definition of deviation." Marx argued that the capitalistic system, which is based on the "division of labor, the institution of private

property,” and “commercial relationships,” alienates humans from their product and they become alienated from themselves and those around them (Wallace and Wolf, 1980). Marx described four kinds of alienation (Longres, 1990): 1) alienation from production; 2) alienation from the product; 3) alienation from others; and 4) alienation from the self. Alienation from production occurs when the workers become separated from the means of production and lose their power to be creative. Assembly line work and the division of tasks have alienated the worker from the product. The seamstress in a clothing factory may sew hundreds of right sleeves to a coat which she has never seen in its entirety, reducing her connection to the final product. Workers become alienated from each other as they compete for the limited rewards and benefits that companies have to offer. Competition and self-interest become primary due to the nature of the system and there is less emphasis placed on cooperation and assistance. Finally, the worker becomes alienated from the self. People come to see themselves as another product that merely exists “to be bought and sold. Thus, we become no different from a product, a machine, a cog in a wheel, a paper puncher” (Longres, 1990, p. 391).

Seeman (1959) has analyzed the historical usage of alienation as an important concept in social theory. He has developed a classification system in which he proposes five basic ways in which alienation has been conceptualized over the years in the social sciences. They are as follows: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement. Powerlessness occurs when people do not believe that their behavior can influence the outcome of decision-making. Meaninglessness refers to individuals’ ambiguity over what to believe as they are unable to understand the decision-making process. Normlessness means that the social norms which regulate people’s behavior have disintegrated and they believe that they will have to utilize unconventional means to attain the desired cultural goals. Isolation refers to individuals distancing themselves from culturally prescribed goals and becoming detached from the goals and

expectations of the system. Finally, self-estrangement refers "to the inability of the individual to find self-rewarding...activities that energize him" (Seeman, 1959, p. 790).

For the poor, poverty can lead to alienation. Poor people have repeatedly witnessed politicians make campaign promises that they later ignored once elected into office. They are apathetic about voting because they do not believe that their vote makes a difference in how the political process functions. The political process has become so complex and dominated by political action committees and other powerful special interest's groups, that it is difficult for poor people to see how they can participate in the decision-making process in a meaningful manner that will influence outcomes. For some of the poor, they believe that they must resort to unconventional means to obtain the goals of the dominant society. They resort to dealing in the regional drug trade or other illegal activities to obtain those material goods that they could not otherwise obtain through the legitimate means made available to them. Some welfare recipients become isolated from the goals and expectations of the system and restructure their goals to maintain their sense of integrity, often times by blaming the system. Finally, poor people often face tremendous psychosocial stress due to a lack of financial, material and emotional resources which limits their ability to experience rewarding activities that can provide them with meaning in their lives.

### Critical Theory

Peter Findlay (1978, p. 55) states, "Critical theory assumes that most individual problems are in fact social problems caused by inequitable social structure...". The critical theorist seeks to limit those things in society which restrict individuals by transforming the system via personal and societal revolutions (Findlay, 1978). Critical theory has been criticized for not having any middle range theories that can provide a social worker with other options than individual anarchy and complete societal revolution (Findlay, 1978). However, Findlay (1978) has argued that transformation can consist of many small

changes that occur over time rather than one major revolutionary event. Witkin and Gottschalk (1988) believe that social work theories should include the viewpoint of disadvantaged persons. They have developed an alternative criteria for theory evaluation that fits well with a critical perspective. They state that theory should: 1) be explicitly critical of the social order; 2) recognize that people are capable of reflecting on their world and transforming their situation; 3) account for the life experiences of the client; and 4) promote social justice. "In the broadest terms, critical social science is an attempt to understand in a rationally responsible manner the oppressive features of society such that this understanding stimulates its audience to transform their society and thereby liberate themselves" (Fay, 1987, p. 4). The intent of critical theory is to promote social change through a three phase process of enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation (Fay, 1987). Fay (1987) cautions that enlightenment by itself is inadequate and does not equate change in the system, rather people must be empowered by the establishment of an effective support system (Solomon, 1976). Social workers commonly build support networks through the use of advocacy, community organization, and mediation on the part of the client (Findlay, 1978). Fay (1987) believes that a group's "false consciousness" is what maintains the dominant social order. He states that critical theory is at once four theories: a theory of false consciousness; a theory of crisis; a theory of education; and a theory of transformative action. Comstock (1982, p. 388) has proposed the following model to guide critical research:

1. Identify social groups or movements whose interests are progressive.
2. Develop an interpretive understanding of the intersubjective meanings, values and motives held by all groups in the setting.
3. Study the historical development of the social conditions and the current social structures that constrain actions and shape understandings.
4. Construct models of relations between social conditions, intersubjective interpretations of those conditions, and participants' actions.
5. Elucidate the fundamental contradictions which are developing as a result of actions based on ideologically frozen understandings.



6. Participate in a program of education with the subjects that gives them new ways of seeing their situation.
7. Participate in a theoretically grounded program of action which will change social conditions and will also engender new, less alienated, understandings and needs.
8. Return to step 2.

The following is an example of how a critical theorist might approach one of the many problems of poverty. For instance, the critical theorist might identify a group of poor women who are having difficulty obtaining their child support payments from their ex-husbands. They would interview them, their ex-spouses, child enforcement officers, lawyers and judges in an attempt to understand all aspects of the problem. They would study the development and implementation of the current laws, regulations and operating procedures of the child enforcement agencies that enforce these laws. The researcher would then construct a model that explains the way the system operates and the problems inherent in the system. They would attempt to determine those aspects of the family and legal system that are dysfunctional because of people's preconceived beliefs, attitudes and values that may be wrought with misunderstanding, stereotypes and prejudice. They would then implement a program based on the findings of the study to educate these single parent mothers about their situation so they may understand more fully what is happening to them and determine what is needed to correct the situation. Finally, the researcher would engage in action research where they would use the data to influence changes in the law, policy or administrative operations that may prevent single parent mothers from obtaining sufficient support to raise their children and live in a more satisfactory fashion. Throughout this process, the researcher seeks to enlighten poor people about their situation, empower them with information, political and economical resources, and emancipate them from their condition of oppression.

In summary, poverty theory focuses on changing one aspect of the person:environment equation. The individual deficit models such as the culture of poverty

theory, and often times the structural functional perspective, view poverty as being caused by personal deficiencies that need to be corrected in order for a person to escape poverty. The environmental models such as conflict, opportunity and critical theory focus on changing the system to make it more responsive to the needs of the individual. None of these theories attempts to address the transactional process that occurs as a poor person interacts with the environment and the need for mutual adaptation on the part of both subsystems as they seek to find a better person:environment fit.

### Contributing Factors

The question is: Why did the problems of working poor people emerge as an issue of concern? Over time the economic structure in the United States shifted from a manufacturing based economy to a service based one increasing the number of working poor people (Day, 1989; Levitan and Shapiro, 1987). From 1981 to 1986, almost 11 million workers lost their jobs due to plant closings or layoffs, and many of them took pay cuts or part-time positions (Levitan and Shapiro, 1987). Sixty-percent of the new service sector jobs created between 1979 and 1984, paid less than \$7,000 per year (Whitman, 1988).

In many cases the earnings of a full-time year-round worker will not raise them and their families above the poverty level (Levitan and Shapiro, 1987). In 1986, a full time, year round worker making minimum wage would earn \$6,968 in a year, which is \$4,200 less than the poverty level of \$11,200 for a family of four (Caputo, 1989).

The following factors have contributed to an increase in the number of working poor people: 1) declining wage levels; 2) loss of rural jobs; 3) stricter eligibility criteria for federal and state benefit programs; 4) high unemployment rates; 5) slow job growth; 6) inadequate education; and 7) a low minimum wage (Shapiro, 1989; Shapiro and Greenstein, 1989). Other obstacles that prevent the working poor from escaping poverty

are inadequate work skills, functional illiteracy, discrimination, lack of affordable day care, and personal problems (Caputo, 1989).

Few of the working poor receive any governmental benefits to assist them in the climb out of poverty. "Indeed it was precisely this group (the working poor) that suffered the most from Ronald Reagan's budget cuts in 1981. The (former) president made it harder to qualify for food stamps and Medicaid, and thus struck a severe blow at the working poor" (Harrington, 1984, p. 110). The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) of 1981, designed to reduce the welfare rolls, penalized the working poor by cutting the number of AFDC recipients with income earnings from 13 percent in 1979 to 6 percent in 1983 (Caputo, 1989). In addition, very few of the working poor utilize governmental assistance with only 34 percent receiving food stamps, 25 percent medicaid, and 10 percent housing assistance (Caputo, 1989). They are also ignored by the education and training programs which focus on the unemployed (Levitan, 1990).

Ellwood (1988) states that "the biggest outrage" for the working poor is their lack of medical protection. The full-time working poor must rely on inadequate medical protection from their employers, purchase expensive health insurance with their limited earnings, or do without. Governmental and employer-provided insurance programs cover only half of the working poor and forty percent of the working poor report that they have no medical insurance .

### Policy Choices

Prior to 1964, the federal government did not recognize the need for working poor people to be eligible to receive welfare benefits (Murray, 1984). In the 1960s and 1970s, the federal government implemented policies to provide support for the working poor. They passed legislation for the expansion of supplementary security income, food stamps, public housing, job training, and job creation efforts (Murray, 1984). In the 1980s, the Reagan administration tightened the requirements for many of these programs in an effort

to get the poor off of welfare. Levitan and Shapiro (1987) state that the Reagan administration opposed "welfare assistance as a last resort for the working poor, arguing that able bodied adults can take care of themselves and that extending support will only encourage endolence" (p. 117). In the process they actually increased the problems of the working poor.

Ellwood (1988) has argued that in a two-parent family, the earnings of one person working year round, full time, ought to be adequate for a family to escape poverty. He suggests that policy for the working poor focus on the following: 1) ensure that everyone has medical protection; 2) make work pay; 3) replace welfare and food stamps with transitional assistance of limited duration; and 4) provide a limited number of jobs for those who have exhausted their transitional assistance. He also supports the need for child care for working families, training, counseling, temporary income support, and increasing the minimum wage.

Caputo (1989) cautions that we must be careful not to create a policy agenda that blames the victim for their poverty, instead of the social and systemic forces that create problems for the working poor. Caputo, like Ellwood, calls for the federal government to take a more active role in assisting the working poor by making work pay, removing employment obstacles, finding and creating jobs, and linking welfare reform efforts with strategies for finding jobs. He supports public service employment in economically depressed regions, the use of the targeted jobs tax credit to stimulate employers to hire the unemployed, and an increase in the minimum wage.

Levitan and Shapiro (1987) suggest that the federal government raise the minimum wage to 50 percent of the average wage, create jobs, more effectively enforce equal opportunity laws, expand second chance educational opportunities and job skill training, provide federal financing of day care for the working poor, reinstitute the earnings disregard to pre-OBRA levels and provide public service jobs to assist able bodied adults who cannot find employment. They estimate that these proposals would cost the federal

government approximately \$10 billion annually and believe this is a reasonable expenditure if the federal government wants to make the working poor a national priority.

### Prior Research

There have been relatively few articles written about the working poor when compared to the extensive number of articles and research that has been conducted on workfare programs, AFDC programs, the feminization of poverty, the homeless and other areas of poverty research. Much of this could be due to the fact that the working poor utilize few government programs and thus do not show up in evaluation studies of state and federal programs. Another reason is that the majority of the working poor are adult white males, whom we may erroneously assume are not having any problems.

A few studies of the working poor have been conducted utilizing data from the University of Michigan, Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), which is a longitudinal data base that began with a sample of 5,000 U.S. families in 1968 and has been updated with annual interviews since that time (Murray, 1987). Other secondary sources of information for study about the working poor come from Labor Department Statistics and the U.S. Census Records. Little research has been conducted of either an experimental or qualitative nature with this population.

In 1973, Sobin published a book entitled, The Working Poor, where he details a study based on a questionnaire survey of 108 unskilled black workers in public and private employment in Newark, Baltimore and Cleveland. Sobin (1973) states that the main goal of the research was to determine the social, economical, and psychological effects of working a low-paying job and to understand how working that job effects people's ability to solve their day to day life problems. The sample of 108 workers, who worked in seven organizations, were chosen by the U.S. Department of Labor for a series of experimentation and demonstration job training programs. They do not appear to have been randomly selected and the generalizability of the findings is limited. The author

reports that a review of the initial data revealed that 32 of the workers in the sample were not representative of the working poor population. This experimental mortality further restricts the external validity of these findings. Nevertheless, this is one of the first efforts to study the needs of the working poor. With appropriate reservations, Sobin (1973) states that a "special survey" of the attitudes and perceptions of the black workers "revealed that low-level jobs give workers few skills, poverty wages, and little personal satisfaction. Workers were found to advance rarely. Many did not even try because they felt that discrimination blocked the path of promotion" (p. 121).

The National Council of Welfare in Canada (1978) reported a lack of information about low-income Canadians who work. Utilizing statistics from Canada's Survey of Consumer Finances in 1974, they attempted to compile some basic information about the working poor population. The article reviewed does not discuss methodology, making it difficult to assess the applicability of the findings, however, 30,000 individuals and families from across Canada provided information for the survey. Their findings were as follows: 1) the working poor are less educated; 2) half of the working poor are employed in farming, fishing, services, clerical and sales jobs; 3) few of the working poor use social assistance programs to increase their income; and 4) the working poor have less job security than the non-poor.

Murray (1987) examined data from the University of Michigan, PSID and concluded that "poverty in America is seldom the result of uncontrollable events involving the economic system" (p.5). He states, "I will argue that the old wisdom--that anyone who is willing to work hard can make a decent living--has much more truth to it than has recently been acknowledged" (Murray, 1987, p. 5). He strongly believes that the PSID data indicates that the working poor can increase their income by participating more in the labor market, but they choose not to do so.

Danzinger and Gottschalk (1986) offer an alternative view to Murrays. After studying the census data for the years 1967 to 1984, these authors state, "Our results cast

doubt on a common perception that most poor households are impoverished because their heads, though capable of doing so, do not work” (p. 17). They found that despite working, the working poor remained in poverty because of low incomes and less than full year work. They discovered that most of these working poor would have remained poor even if they had worked for an entire year at their current wages.

Muscovice and Craig (1984) conducted a study of the effects of the Omnibus Reconciliation Act on the working poor. They utilized a single time series design to study the effects of the impact of the OBRA cutbacks on 3300 working AFDC recipients located in Hennepin County, Minnesota, beginning in January of 1982. The researchers made observations of the behavior of AFDC recipients in January of 1982, July of 1982, and again in January of 1983. The treatment variable, implementation of OBRA, occurred in February of 1982. Of concern is the fact that only 28 percent of the 3300 recipients agreed to participate in the study. However, the researchers did compare the demographic characteristics of respondents to nonrespondents and concluded that the respondents were sufficiently representative of the overall population (Muscovice and Craig, 1984).

Nevertheless, the generalizability of these findings may be limited to places similar to Hennepin County with “its favorable employment climate, wealth of vocational training programs and resources, serious enforcement of work requirements and relatively generous benefit structure” (Muscovice and Craig, 1984, p. 51). Many locations in the United States do not have the impressive support structure of this county.

The researchers initial six-month findings were the following: 1) the participants’ financial situation worsened; and 2) these families delayed seeing physicians and dentists longer due to an inability to pay. In addition, the participants were required to pay over 40% of their total health care expenses due to a lack of insurance coverage (Muscovice and Craig, 1984). The researchers concluded by saying that, “The AFDC program is no longer being used to help the working poor make the transition from welfare dependence to economic dependence. At the same time, the current economy has not proved to be an

adequate substitute for direct governmental intervention in helping the working poor to relieve their financial plight” (Muscovice and Craig, 1984, p. 60).

Three years later, Muscovice, Craig and Pitt (1987) published a second study that examined the long term effects of OBRA on the working poor. The researchers acknowledged the inability to develop a control group for analysis due to the mandatory nature of the federal legislation. Subsequently, it was not possible to account for extraneous variables such as the economic recession that took place during the years of the study. Despite these limitations of the study, the one and two year follow-up observations revealed the following findings: 1) the majority of those terminated from AFDC because of OBRA did not return to welfare; 2) net income for these families increased slightly; and 3) families increased their earnings from work by having other family members enter the work force rather than resort to some other public program for support.

Finally, Jones and Wattenberg (1991) conducted a study of a loan program that provided financial assistance for low-income, single parent mothers who were working, but still poor. Loans were limited to \$500 and were used primarily by the recipients to purchase and repair cars or to pay for rent or damage deposits in securing housing. The findings revealed that there was only a 46 percent average repayment rate for all loan recipients. However, in telephone interviews of loan recipients seven to eight months after receiving loans, the majority of the women reported that the loans helped them to maintain the necessary transportation to continue working or attending school and prevented eviction or the shutting off of utilities. Surprisingly, most of the respondents stated that they would prefer that the loan program remain as such rather than become a grant program because it gave them a sense of pride when they were able to repay a loan. Jones and Wattenberg (1991) recommend that loan programs be implemented in local communities to assist single parent, working poor women when their families encounter unexpected and necessary expenses such as auto repair or high utility costs. While the authors acknowledge that



these loan programs cannot alleviate the poverty of the working poor they see them as essential in meeting the emergency needs of this underserved population.

### Future Research Needs

There are many gaps in our knowledge and understanding of the working poor and the problems they face. Most of our prior research efforts have focused on secondary data sources such as the PSID data, labor department statistics and census data. Isabel Sawhill, of the Urban Institute states, "We don't know anything about the psychological profile of the working poor" (Whitman, 1988, pp. 20-21). The National Council of Welfare in Canada (1978) reports that their research is limited in that "it cannot give the human side, the day-to-day experience of actual families in specific communities" (p. 346). They caution the reader of their findings that "we should not forget that behind the numbers are real Canadian families who are working, who are poor, and who must live with all the consequences of poverty" (The National Council of Welfare in Canada, 1978, p. 346).

Katz (1989) has criticized quantitative studies for creating stereotypes of the poor because these studies demand "the creation of categories without which statistical analysis is impossible" which leads to the "isolation of human attributes from their role in the complex configurations of individual lives" (p. 170). He argues for more qualitative studies of the poor. Katz (1989) states, "Its minimal contribution is the destruction of stereotypes; its signal achievement, in the work of its most able practitioners is a portrait of the world from the vantage point of its subjects" (p.170-171).

Duncan and Tickamyer (1988) state, "...one very important direction for research is comprehensive ethnographic studies of rural poverty populations along the lines of Liebow and Stack, bringing together detailed understanding of material position and 'lived experience' " (p. 252). These authors believe that ethnography and indepth case studies can provide us with the opportunity "to further specify the situations under which patterns

of behavior and belief associated with culture of poverty occur, to what extent and why...”  
(Duncan and Tickamyer, 1988, p. 252).

In summary, Duncan and Tickamyer (1988) state that a

Better understanding of rural poverty--which includes so many working poor--would provide a critical contribution to current efforts to advance debates about poverty's causes by clarifying relationships between the economy, opportunity and poverty. (p. 250)

Finally, Charles Murray (1987) recommends that someone draw a representative sample and identify a subsample of all persons below the poverty line. He suggests a qualitative study be conducted to enable the working poor to answer “the kinds of questions that the numbers cannot answer” (pp. 17-18).

These authors support the need for qualitative studies of the working poor and their families to ascertain their situation and condition. Qualitative research can enable the researcher to obtain an indepth understanding of why the working poor are poor; the strategies they utilize to survive on a limited income; the barriers that prevent them from exiting poverty; and the working poor's recommendations for improving their situation.

### Conclusions

Research efforts to date provide some general understanding of who the working poor are, their number and some of the causes of their problems. However, other issues of concern for working poor people remain. What factors contribute to the poverty of working people? Do working poor people exhibit the behavioral traits of the culture of poverty, and if so, to what extent and why? What impact do these traits have on their condition of poverty? How do working poor people interact with their environment? What transactions occur between these two forces? What is the process by which working poor people manage to survive on a limited income? What factors prevent them from exiting

poverty? Why don't more rural poor people relocate to other areas of the country where greater economic opportunity exists?

Finally, this study can educate legislators and policy makers about the problems of working poor people and provide them with information to develop policies that will support them. If work is to be promoted as something that is good and desirable in our society we must not neglect working poor people. This study can provide policy makers and legislators with the opportunity to "walk in the shoes" of the working poor so they can come to understand working poor people's perspective of the problems they face. If we do not support the working poor, we may contribute to an erosion of the work ethic which our socioeconomic system is based upon. For this reason, it is critical that a support network be developed that ensures that those who work will be able to maintain a standard of living that is sufficient to keep them from falling into poverty.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### A Naturalistic Approach to Inquiry

Naturalistic inquiry and qualitative research methods were used in this study because they were believed to be the most effective means to discover the subjective meaning and multiple realities of the problems that the working poor encounter in their daily lives. Naturalistic inquiry is steeped in the traditions of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) which

is a down-to-earth approach to the scientific study of human life and human conduct. Its empirical world is the natural world of such group life and conduct. It lodges its problems in this natural world, conducts its studies in it, and derives its interpretations from such naturalistic studies. (p. 47)

Symbolic interactionism is based on three premises (Blumer, 1969): 1) people act toward things based on the meaning those things have for them; 2) the meaning of things is derived through social interaction with others; and 3) meanings are determined by people through an interpretive process. In the final analysis, Blumer (1969, p. 46) states that "The merit of naturalistic inquiry is that it respects and stays close to the empirical domain." This study was conducted in the homes and communities of working poor people to answer the kinds of questions that the numbers could not answer (Murray, 1987).

Many scholars in the field of social work have called for more extensive use of qualitative methods in social work research (Jacobsen, 1988; Mullen, 1985; Pieper, 1985; Rodwell, 1987; Ruckdeschel, 1985). Naturalistic inquiry is consistent with the social work values of self-determination, dignity and self-worth (Rodwell, 1985).

Scott (1989) states, "A hermeneutic approach that attempts to understand the complex ecology of interacting meanings of events in person-situation configurations is central to social work" (p. 39). Rodwell (1987) writes that "what is suggested by the naturalistic paradigm is at the very base of the working definition of social work" (p. 236).

The interpretive approach is not new to social workers (Scott, 1989). Social workers have been conducting naturalistic inquiry since the early days of the profession. Everyday, social workers interact with clients in their environment and seek to ascertain the meaning of their situation and those around them, in an attempt to promote health and personal growth. It is only in recent years with the positivistic push toward becoming a "hard science" that social work has begun to retreat from what was once its forte. Social Work, being a part of the larger intellectual community, became enamored with the idea that a technological society armed with science and rationalism had the capability of solving all social problems. Ruckdeschel (1985) states that a qualitative perspective has emerged in social work that fits nicely with social work values. This qualitative perspective includes the following aspects:

- 1) People are essentially interpretive and symbol constructing.
- 2) Knowledge is gained most directly by the process of participation and involvement.
- 3) Reality is multi-layered and multi-perspective.
- 4) Perception and behavior are strongly influenced by the context in which they occur.
- 5) Data gathering must involve the use of multiple sources and multiple methods. (p. 18)

These core elements of the naturalistic perspective conflict sharply with the conventional positivistic argument that:

...all problems are empirical, measurable, quantifiable, operationalized, simplified and resolvable. The ideal researcher is in this utopia, objective, free of bias, removed from clients or subjects being studied... (Pieper, 1985, p.3)

Social work should take advantage of the alternative ways of knowing. These alternative ways of knowing (such as naturalistic inquiry), can effectively extend the knowledge base of the profession in such a way that social workers develop an indepth understanding of the person in the environment, that has real utility for their practice.

Naturalistic inquiry was particularly advantageous in this study for two reasons. First, Appalachians tend to be suspicious of the well-educated and fearful of the outside world (Weller, 1965). In many cases, they will not respond to questionnaires or interviews from outsiders. The researcher had to maintain prolonged contact in the field to develop the necessary trust to obtain reliable data about the condition of the working poor. He had to develop a collaborative relationship with each research participant to determine what it means to work, but remain poor. Secondly, Messenger (1982) has stated, "that the people most affected often know the most about what changes have to be made...". The researcher was interested in obtaining the working poor persons' opinion of what changes needed to be made to improve their condition. For these reasons, naturalistic inquiry was chosen as the preferred method for developing a *verstehen* of the working poor people of Appalachian Ohio.

### Research Design

Naturalistic inquiry studies phenomena in the natural context in which it occurs and renders behavior and context in a rich and densely detailed fashion. In this study the researcher sought to develop an interpretive understanding of the meaning the working poor give to their unique situation through qualitative interviews, participant observation and document analysis. As the data were collected, the constant comparative method of data analysis was utilized and subsequent themes emerged from the data from which a grounded theory about the needs of the working poor evolved. A major methodological contribution of this study was the use of theoretical triangulation. Grounded theory was triangulated with the culture of poverty and structural/opportunity theories of poverty to

develop a localized theory of the problem of poverty for the rural working poor of Appalachian Ohio.

### Focus of the Study

All the elements of a naturalistic inquiry could not be specified a priori. However, there was a need to determine the focus of the inquiry in order to: 1) establish boundaries for the study; and 2) to develop criteria from which the researcher could make decisions about what should be included, or excluded from the study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Nevertheless, Lincoln and Guba (1985) state, "that boundaries are not cast in concrete; they can be altered and, in the typical naturalistic inquiry, will be" (p. 228).

Keeping this in mind, the research project focused on the problems of the working poor in rural Appalachian Ohio and sought to develop an understanding of the following:

- 1) The causes of poverty for the working poor.
- 2) The psycho-social effects of poverty on the working poor.
- 3) The support system the working poor utilize to maintain their standard of living.
- 4) The survival strategies the rural working poor use to make it on a limited income.
- 5) The barriers that prevent them from exiting poverty.
- 6) The working poor's recommendations for improving their situation.

### The Setting

Appalachian Ohio is an economically depressed rural region with as many as 34% of the residents in some counties living in poverty (CEOGC, 1990). The assumption was made that among these poor people, a large proportion would be working poor persons based on the reports of Porter (1989), and Shapiro and Greenstein (1988).

Twenty-nine of the 88 counties of Ohio are designated as part of the Appalachian region by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). These counties are located in the hilly and heavily forested, southern and southeastern sections of the state that border the Ohio River. While this region of the state is rich in natural resources, i.e. coal and timber, it is traditionally one of the poorest areas of the state (CEOGC, 1990) and heavily dependent upon the boom and bust economy of the coal mining industry (Caudill, 1963; Shannon, 1943). Appalachian Ohio is similar to other areas of the Appalachian region. Its residents have historically encountered the problems of: high unemployment, low income, inadequate education, poor housing, high outmigration, and a large amount of land that is unsuitable for extensive agricultural or industrial activity because of steep slopes and poor soil (CEOGC, 1990; Shannon, 1943; Watts, 1983).

The 19% poverty rate for the Appalachian region of Ohio is far higher than the state rate of 14%. It is estimated that there are approximately 264,000 poor persons in Ohio's 29 Appalachian counties. In 11 of the Appalachian counties, over one-third of the population now lives below the 125% poverty level, with Vinton County leading the way with an astronomical 50% rate (CEOGC, 1990). In 1988, all 16 counties with a per capita income of less than 70% of the Ohio average were located in Ohio's Appalachian region. For example, Adams County had a per capita income of only \$8,477. This figure is much less than the average Ohio per capita income of \$15,545 (OPEC, 1990). Food stamp use has increased by over 87% in some Appalachian counties between 1980 and 1988 due to mine layoffs in the region (Ring, 1989). The Ohio Poverty Indicators report (1990) states the following:

During the 1970's, poverty rates in Appalachia declined by 18%. This significant improvement during the 1970's was entirely erased by a 56% regional poverty increase during the 1980's, and Appalachian poverty is now more severe in Ohio than it was two decades ago. Nearly one-fifth of the state's Appalachian population is poor. (p.63)



During the 1980s unemployment became rampant in the coal fields of southeastern Ohio (Yocum, 1986). The number of jobs available in the coal mines were reduced by strict environmental laws that decreased the need for the high-sulfur coal in the Appalachian region (OCDO, 1989). Advances in mining technology resulted in the need for fewer miners to mine the same amount of coal. This led to the massive layoff of coal miners with over 10,000 coal mining jobs being lost in the Ohio Valley during the 1980s (Yocum, 1986). While the urban commerce centers of Ohio, such as Columbus, Cleveland and Cincinnati have seen economic improvement in the last several years, the rural areas of Appalachian Ohio remain quietly impoverished with a sense of overwhelming hopelessness. Michael Harrington (1984) compares the city of Columbus with the Appalachian region of Ohio:

If, for example, you fly into Columbus, Ohio -- a city so quintessentially American that it is used by pollsters as a stand-in for middle America--and drive south, it takes little sensitivity to notice the poverty along the road. The highway itself narrows and begins to twist and turn; the fields and factories give way to hills and shabby towns. By the time you reach Athens, Ohio, which is on the northern edge of Appalachia, you have made a transition into another world. The beauty of the landscape and the seeming quaintness of the people, the very otherness of the place, have tended to conceal the unromantic fact that it is very much integrated into the American corporate economy. Misery here is functional, not an accident; the glow is often tubercular. (pp. 214-215)

Poverty in Appalachian Ohio has become as Michael Harrington has said, "tubercular." In conjunction with the collapse of the coal mining industry, many steel mills, glass and pottery factories and small manufacturing plants have closed over the past ten years decreasing substantially the number of job opportunities (Lane, 1990). At the same time there has been a lack of new economic development in the region. Any new job growth that has occurred in recent years has been in the services industry and retail trades which provide workers with low wages, a shortage of hours and benefits (CEOGC, 1990). Many former steel mill workers, coal miners and plant workers are now unemployed and

have been so for an extensive period of time. These people no longer receive unemployment benefits to ward off the impending poverty. They have slowly used up their economic resources, selling off what they do own to establish eligibility for welfare benefits. These individuals have become entrenched as the new poor. They are the high school graduates who are unable to find employment and do not wish to re-locate due to strong family ties. They are the young coal miners who have been laid off and have few transferable work skills to seek another job. They are the seasoned steel mill workers with an 8th grade education, who are 55 years old and no longer in demand in a tight job market. Those who are fortunate enough to find work in the service and retail sector often find themselves living in poverty due to the low wage structure that has replaced the high paying steel mill and coal mining positions (CEOGC, 1990). This persistent lack of "quality" job opportunities in close proximity to their homes, has led them into a state of poverty and welfare dependency that is pervasive and consuming. These people have few other options. Poverty has become inescapable for many who live in Appalachian Ohio.

### Gaining Access

The researcher conducted a pilot study of the rural working poor of Appalachia in the summer of 1989. In this pilot study it was discovered that formal organizations such as the chamber of commerce and government offices (welfare, employment and community action agencies) were not especially helpful in identifying participants to be interviewed for the study. In the pilot study the researcher developed a two-directional approach to the problem of gaining entry. He proceeded to work simultaneously through one of the local community action agency planners and through personal friends and family members to obtain participants. He discussed the purpose of the project with them, explained the eligibility criteria and asked them to solicit participants for the study. Both of these methods proved fruitful. People were much more willing to participate in the project after having been approached by "one of their own."

Later in the pilot study, the researcher used participants to identify other people who would be willing to participate in the study and this form of snowball sampling was even more successful. It was through this method of using an "agent" or "representative" who could vouch for the researchers being "ok", that he was able to gain entry into a community that tends to be close knit and reserved in its dealings with outsiders. During the dissertation phase of the study a representative of Catholic Charities provided the researcher with numerous participants for the study and the researcher continued snowball sampling based on the needs of the project.

### Sampling Procedures

Purposive sampling methods were utilized in this study as research participants were included in the study because they were "believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory" (Bogden and Biklen, 1982, p. 67). The researcher sought participants who could provide him with information that would enhance his understanding of the rural working poor population in southeastern Ohio. As the researcher began to build a theory of the rural working poor based on the data acquired in initial interviews, the researcher focused and developed new questions about the working poor. Through this process the researcher sought out those working poor whom he believed would best be able to answer these questions or provide insights into the hypothesized conditions. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) state that "this is not random sampling; that is, sampling to insure that the characteristics of the subjects in your study appear in the same proportion they appear in the total population" (p.67).

This study made use of the maximum variation in sampling technique, which is recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) when conducting naturalistic investigations. They state "that the purpose of sampling will be to include as much information as possible, in all of its various ramifications and constructions..." (p. 201). Maximum variation was achieved by choosing each successive unit after the previous participant had

been interviewed and the data analyzed. The researcher then picked the next participant based on his or her utility to provide the researcher with the new information which was needed. Sampling was continuously adjusted in this way. Finally, the researcher ceased interviewing when no new information was coming from recent participants in the study and/or the information was becoming redundant (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

### Population and Sample

For the purposes of this study, the population was defined as the working poor of rural Appalachian Ohio. All participants for this research project worked within the past year, resided within the 29 counties of Appalachian Ohio, and their income fell below the 1990 Poverty Guidelines established by the federal government based on the size of their family.

The sample for this study consisted of 26 working poor households. Because some of the families had two people working at the time of the study there were a total of 30 working poor people interviewed. Of this working poor sample, 15 were males and 15 females. Twenty-two of the working poor people were married and seven were divorced. The participants in the study ranged in age from 23 to 51, and their mean age was 34. Twenty-eight of the participants were white and two were black. The religious affiliation of the participants was diverse, e.g. Baptist, Catholic, Charismatic, Church of Christ, Church of God and Lutheran. Following the principles of maximum variation in sampling, the researcher interviewed a wide variety of different occupations that paid poverty level wages. The participants worked as auto body mechanics, carpenters, carpet cleaners, cooks, factory workers, farmers, grocery store clerks, painters, secretaries, and waitresses (for a complete listing see Appendix D). While a few of the research participants were unable to estimate their average yearly income, using hourly wage figures and an estimation of hours worked the average yearly income of the of the working poor participants was \$9,391.82 for the past year. The family members interviewed consisted of seven spouses

and four teenage children. Two providers of services to the working poor were interviewed, six families participating in the Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, one unemployed young man, and a family with a disabled worker to get a better overall picture of poverty in this rural community. Additionally, the researcher came into contact with numerous other low-income and working poor people in the course of participant observation that further enhanced his understanding of rural poverty.

### Data Collection

Data collection took place over a one and a half year period of time from June of 1989 to December of 1990. Most of the interviews were conducted from June through August of 1989 and from June through November of 1990. The researcher conducted a total of 32 indepth interviews that lasted from 2 to 4 hours each. All interviews, except those that occurred in an impromptu fashion during participant observations, were tape recorded in their entirety and transcribed. Hand written notes were made by the researcher of all field observations after the fact. Secondary data sources such as census records, poverty reports, and newspaper articles were collected and analyzed.

### Interviews

The initial interviews with the participants were semi-structured, indepth interviews conducted to explore the dimensions of the problems that the working poor face. The interviewer, acting as the human instrument, used a questioning guide (See Appendix D) to assist him in guiding the questioning and focusing on the research questions.

The value of instrumentation in a qualitative study can be argued, but Miles and Huberman (1984) state that interview schedules need to be focused or "too much superflous information will be collected" (p. 43). For this reason, this researcher chose to utilize a questioning guide to focus the questioning (but not limit it). However, Miles and Huberman (1984) caution that instrumentation in a qualitative study must be continuously

revised as new themes and patterns emerge from the data that need to be followed up. This is contrary to a conventional survey instrument where the instrument must remain stable if the researcher is to be able to conduct test-retest reliability. In qualitative research, "issues of instrument validity and reliability ride largely on the skills of the researcher" (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 46). Utilizing the constant comparative form of data analysis developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the interviewer then developed some working hypotheses and began to construct more structured, focused interviews to obtain answers to specific questions.

### Participant Observation

When the opportunity presented itself, the researcher made every effort to participate as an observer in the daily lives and activities of a small sample of working poor persons to develop a fuller understanding of their life situation. For example, the researcher spent a day with a tobacco farmer, Christmas with another family, attended football and basketball games, worked in a rural soup kitchen, lived in a homeless shelter, observed a working poor person shoeing horses for extra money, and went with a working poor family to their local welfare office when they reapplied for welfare benefits. On most occasions, participant observation was not planned. The opportunity presented itself and the researcher took advantage of the situation to learn more about the working poor. The researcher spent a total of 149 hours participating in the day-to-day affairs of various working poor people and their families.

"Participant observation is a commitment to adopt the perspective of those studied by sharing in their day-to-day experiences" (Denzin, 1989, p. 156). This method helped the researcher share in the participant's subjective and symbolic world (Denzin, 1989) which created opportunities to develop a thick and rich description of the life world of the rural working poor, beyond the basic information which can be obtained in a 2-3 hour interview. Another advantage of participant observation was its ability to provide the

researcher with the opportunity to make significant discoveries about the lives of the working poor that were unanticipated by the researcher (Whyte, 1984). Notes on any participant observations were written in a reflexive journal the following day after being in the field.

### Document Analysis

During the course of the study the researcher collected and analyzed articles from a variety of different newspapers in and outside of the region that addressed the cultural, social, political and economic problems of the region. In addition, census, unemployment and poverty reports were collected and analyzed. The researcher was also able to obtain a copy of the transcripts of a television show that addressed the economic problems of the region and several copies of letters that a working poor person sent to legislators requesting assistance for her family. A total of 102 documents were collected and analyzed to provide an additional source of data about rural poverty in Appalachian Ohio.

### Instrumentation and Researcher Bias

The human instrument (the researcher), was used to interview, observe and collect data from research participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that the human is the instrument of choice in naturalistic inquiry for the following reasons: 1) it can be more responsive; 2) it is adaptable to different situations; 3) it can make sense of the world in a holistic sense; 4) it can clarify and summarize data for the respondent and receive feedback immediately; and 5) it is capable of exploring atypical responses that conventional instruments cannot.

The human instrument was the most appropriate instrumentation for this project, due to the fact that Appalachian Ohioans tend to be "clannish" and distrustful of outsiders, particularly researchers. Thus, the researcher worked to establish rapport and trust with

participants to obtain valid and reliable information. Fetterman (1989) states:

The Ethnographer also begins with biases and preconceived notions about how people behave and what they think...Indeed, the choice of what problem, geographic area, or people to study is itself biased...To mitigate the negative effects of bias, the ethnographer must first make specific biases explicit. (p. 11)

The researcher attended high school in Appalachian Ohio as a youth. Most of the researcher's family still live in southeastern Ohio. While these family members were not the focus of this study they were utilized as key informants. They also provided the researcher with a very personal connection to the people of southeastern Ohio and the problems they face, and were a constant source of feedback and reflection on the findings.

Stephenson and Greer (1981) have written about the advantages and disadvantages that exist for native investigators who are familiar with the environment they are studying. They report the following disadvantages: 1) a researcher studying their own culture may not see significant observations because they are too familiar with the culture which may lead to a bias in what is observed and recorded; 2) the researcher must make a concerted effort to break out of fixed patterns of living in the community; 3) there is potential for role and value conflicts over sensitive ethical issues such as confidentiality of material; 4) the selection of informants may be biased; and 5) the problem of disengagement from the field may be more difficult for a native investigator.

It is possible that this researcher may have overlooked a significant observation because he was too familiar with the culture, but this disadvantage is countered by the advantage of being able to quickly move beyond that which is already known about the community in which he studied. A variety of referral sources helped move the researcher out of any fixed patterns of living in the community as they and the people they referred for the study were living in different sections of the region. While the overwhelming majority of respondents for the study were not known to the researcher prior to the study, confidentiality was still a sensitive issue as many of the respondents were known in the



community by acquaintances of the researcher. Multiple referral sources helped eliminate any concern over bias in selecting participants for the study. Finally, the researcher did find disengagement from the field to be particularly difficult. Even after the information obtained from later respondents began to be repetitive the researcher had difficulty recognizing that the categories were saturated and that it was time to cease data collection and terminate the field work part of the study.

Stephenson and Greer (1981) report that the native investigator has the following advantages when studying their own culture: 1) they are familiar with the culture and need less time to become acclimated with the environment; 2) they are less likely to have misunderstandings in interpretations of the meanings people give to events in their lives; 3) the researcher is able to move quickly beyond the limits of what is already known in a community because of their familiarity; and 4) a general knowledge of a culture can be an advantage in developing entree and in establishing rapport with the participants.

The researcher did find that being a native of the region allowed him to gain entree into the research site and establish rapport with the respondents more readily. He was able to move more quickly into substantive questions due to his familiarity with the cultural environment. He also recognized the potential to over identify with working poor people and their problems from the outset of the study. However, it should be noted that the researcher left the region at the age of 18, when he joined the U.S. Army and has spent many years living in different parts of the United States from Washington, DC to California. During this time, he has had the opportunity to work in a variety of social work settings, with many different racial and ethnic groups. He has been exposed to a wide range of educational experiences in four different institutions. Over the course of time, a certain distance has been created between the researcher and his former world. These life experiences have expanded his view of the world and helped him to study the problems of the region with both the eyes and ears of an outsider, as well as an insider.

The researcher also recognized an inherent bias that could lead him to explain poverty as a problem of the system, i.e. the opportunity/structural theory of poverty, while ignoring the personal problems of the working poor themselves that may restrict their social mobility in society. To compensate for this bias, the researcher sought out disconfirming cases, incidents and events that examine the individual deficiencies that promote poverty among Appalachians of southeastern Ohio. The reflexive journal and committee members were also used as a sounding board to check for potential bias in the selection of participants, the questions asked of them, and the observations made.

### Validity and Reliability

Qualitative research has been criticized for being "unscientific" (Kvale, 1989). In positivistic science validity is concerned with whether a measure accurately reflects the concept it is intended to measure (Babbie, 1986). From a broader perspective, "validity pertains to the extent that a method investigates what it is intended to investigate..." (Kvale, 1989, p. 74). In order to ascertain the validity of a qualitative study, Kvale (1989) states that the researcher must theoretically question the nature of the problem being studied in an attempt to develop a theory of social reality. Communicative validity must be accomplished by challenging knowledge claims through discourse with the participants in a collaborative relationship. Finally, pragmatic validity allows the researcher to see knowledge become action thus, "truth is whatever assists us to take actions that produce the desired results" (Kvale, 1989, p. 86).

As with all studies, this research was concerned with the trustworthiness of the findings. In the positivistic paradigm, the criteria for establishing trustworthiness are internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity (Lincoln and Guba, 1986). Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend that these traditional criteria be replaced with new terms that more closely match the needs of the naturalistic paradigm. Thus, credibility is

used in place of internal validity; transferability replaces external validity; dependability replaces reliability; and confirmability is used in place of objectivity.

### Credibility

In naturalistic inquiry the researcher seeks to establish the credibility of the findings. The credibility of the findings of this study were established by utilizing the following techniques proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985):

- 1) Prolonged engagement and persistent observation: A process whereby the researcher spends sufficient time in the field to understand the culture, to build trust with the participants, and to test "for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents..." (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 301).
- 2) Triangulation: This study utilized data, theoretical and methodological triangulation to establish the credibility of the findings as is recommended by Patton (1990). Data triangulation was accomplished by seeking multiple sources of information such as the following: the working poor themselves, members of the working poor person's families, other kinds of poor people, and providers of social services to the working poor. In addition, the researcher developed a grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) of the working poor, and compared this grounded theory with the other existing theories of poverty. Finally, a variety of research methods were utilized to assess the situation of the working poor including: face to face interviews, participant observation, and document analysis.

3) Peer Debriefing: Members of the doctoral dissertation committee and his spouse were used to debrief the researcher on a regular basis for the purpose of testing hypotheses and examining themes and trends in the data collection with someone who was an objective, outside observer.

4) Member Checking: The researcher used the member check procedure, "whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected, (which) is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility of the findings" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 314).

A small group of participants were asked to critique a summary report of the findings to provide the researcher with their impressions of the accuracy and credibility of the findings. Member checking also took place on a regular basis as the researcher frequently checked with the participants during interviews in order to ensure that the respondent understood the questions, and to confirm that the researcher understood what the respondent was saying .

#### Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) state, "the naturalist cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry; he or she can only provide the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether a transfer (of the findings) can be contemplated as a possibility" (p. 316).

#### Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that "there can be no validity without reliability and subsequently no credibility without dependability" (p. 316). The researcher adhered to the

following recommendations of Lincoln and Guba (1985) to strengthen the dependability of the findings: 1) overlapping methods of data collection and 2) maintaining an audit trail. This method consisted of an auditor (in this case the doctoral dissertation committee chair), who was called in to authenticate the accounts of the researcher to ensure that they were representative of the participants and to examine the accuracy of the findings, by making sure that all the statements were justified and supported by the documentation.

### Confirmability

Confirmability was established by following Lincoln and Guba's suggestions, i.e. 1) conducting a confirmability audit; 2) triangulation; and 3) the keeping of a reflexive journal. The reflexive journal is a diary in which the researcher recorded a variety of information about his feelings and thoughts about the research project and made notations about the schedule, logistics and methodological issues of the study.

### Data Analysis

The constant comparative method of data analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was utilized by the researcher to develop a grounded theory about the condition of the rural working poor. The use of the constant comparative method of data analysis required that data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). After each round of data collection the researcher analyzed the issues, events, concepts and themes that emerged from the data. This resulted in subsequent data collection efforts being utilized to obtain information that would answer any new questions, issues or concerns that emerged from the constant comparative process.

The taped interviews resulted in 760 pages of single-spaced, transcribed notes that were taken verbatim from the tape recorded interviews. From these transcribed notes, 1377 coded index cards were entered into a computerized data base, which were then

inductively analyzed. Each card contained a unit of information that consisted of a sentence or paragraph that expressed a common idea.

Patton (1990) states that the first task of qualitative analysis is description and the development of a classification system to simplify reality so the researcher can better understand its complexities. He recommends that the qualitative researcher use the interview guide as a "descriptive analytical framework" for the initial analysis of the data. In this study, the interview guide was actually based on the findings of some initial pilot interviews and the emergent data. As the data were collected, coding of the interviews was initiated and a classification system began to emerge where major categories were identified. These major categories were required to have what Patton (1990) calls "internal homogeneity" and "external heterogeneity." In other words, information within the category had to fit with the other units of information and the units of information within a category had to be substantially different from and mutually exclusive of the other categories.

Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 37) state that "...the main purpose of using the grounded theory method is to develop theory." These authors specify four requirements of a well-constructed grounded theory: 1) it must fit with the everyday reality of the situation; 2) it must be understandable and make sense to the researcher, the research participants and practitioners in the field; 3) it should be abstract and broad enough that it may be applied to a variety of different situations and settings; and 4) the theory should guide action by stating the conditions under which the theory is relevant and has utility.

To develop a grounded theory the researcher followed the method recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990) where three types of coding are incorporated into the analytic framework. These three types of coding are called open, axial and selective coding. To analyze the data and develop a grounded theory of rural poverty for the working poor the researcher followed a three-stage process. First, open coding was conducted and the transcription was broken down into units of information which were then organized into

major categories that emerged from the transcribed interviews and field observations. This process of open coding stimulated the discovery of categorical properties which then formed connectors between categories and subcategories. Secondly, axial coding was completed and connections were made between categories. This was accomplished by following an analytic model developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). This model allowed the researcher to systematically link data in complex ways. The model consisted of the following components which will be elaborated upon further in Chapter 6:

- A) Causal Conditions>
- B) Phenomenon (or central concept) >
- C) Context >
- D) Intervening Conditions >
- E) Action/Interaction Strategies > and
- F) Consequences.

Lastly, selective coding was completed. This is the "process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 116). This was accomplished by establishing a story line, connecting secondary categories to the "core category" by using the paradigm, developing categories at the dimensional level of analysis, validating the relationships between the categories with the data, and filling in categories that needed further development.

In summary, Strauss and Corbin (1990) caution the researcher using a grounded theory method: "Your final theory is limited to those categories, their properties and dimension, and statements of relationships that exist in the actual data collected--not what you think might be out there but haven't come across" (p. 112). The researcher worked diligently to ensure that there was data to support each of the categories and their relationship to one another in the building of a grounded theory.

Finally, the researcher ceased collecting and analyzing data when the categories were saturated and little new information was being discovered in subsequent interviews;

regularities emerged and sense of integration occurred; and when the new information that was obtained no longer fit the focus of the study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

#### Protection of Research Participants

The researcher believed that many rural Appalachians would become suspicious when asked to sign an informed consent form. For this reason, he requested permission to provide the participants with informed consent by presenting the information verbally to each participant in the study. This request was granted by the Behavioral and Social Sciences Human Subjects Review Committee of The Ohio State University. The researcher presented the following information to each research participant:

- 1) The purpose of the study.
- 2) A statement that participation in the study was purely voluntary.
- 3) A statement that they had the right to answer or not answer any question asked of them, as well as the right to stop the interview at any point in time. They also had the right to terminate participation in the research study at any time.
- 4) They were informed that the researcher would be the only person who would have knowledge of their names and addresses. All raw data to be reviewed by outside sources such as the dissertation committee would be purged of any identifying information. All names and addresses were maintained by the researcher in a locked drawer in a file cabinet in his office.
- 5) The participants were informed that every attempt would be made to maintain their confidentiality (See Appendix E for a copy of the oral solicitation statement).

The researcher also provided each research participant of the study with a written statement identifying the investigators affiliation with Ohio State, phone number and title of the study (See Appendix F for a copy of written statement). Though the probability was slight, there was always the possibility that a participant in the study may have experienced some stress or problems due to the interview process. The researcher had over 8 years



experience as a clinical social worker and was a Board Certified Diplomate in Clinical Social Work prior to the study. He was prepared to assess any problems that may have arisen for any respondent due to participation in the study. One respondent was referred to a Vietnam veteran's support group for assistance with a possible post-traumatic stress disorder.

### Strengths and Limitations

The strength of a naturalistic study about the rural working poor is its ability to capture an indepth understanding of the multiple realities of the working poor from their perspective. Naturalistic inquiry is realistic and relevant to the study of social problems such as poverty. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) state that naturalistic inquiry's strengths are its flexibility in the use of methods and multiple data sources, which can open up new avenues of exploration that were not planned a priori. Duncan and Tickamyer (1988) believe that an indepth study of the rural working poor can help us reconceptualize our analysis of the causes of rural poverty and provide important advances in poverty theory and subsequently, important influences on public policy.

They state:

At the core of much theoretical debate about poverty is the question of how much poverty is caused by unwillingness to work versus the unavailability to work. Because so many of the rural poor work and live in two-parent families and because the labor market opportunities are more limited, analyses that examine segments of the rural poor could provide insight into issues that have long plagued poverty research. (p. 246)

Naturalistic research is limited in that it is labor intensive and not suitable for studying large numbers of people. While the results of this study can only be cautiously generalized to other populations of the working poor, this study can generate hypotheses that would be amenable to more systematic quantitative testing. In addition, the researcher

can provide the reader with the necessary thick description so they can make a decision about the transferability of the findings to their own situation.

In conclusion, Babbie (1986) states that when compared with quantitative studies, qualitative studies "generally have more validity but less reliability, and field research results cannot be generalized as safely as those based on rigorous sampling and standardized questionnaires" (p. 263). Babbie (1986) states that the comprehensiveness of qualitative methods allows for exceptionally detailed and indepth measures of the meaning that people give to their life situations. This can aid social scientists in developing a fuller understanding of working poor people's behavior within the context in which it occurs. However, while this indepth, comprehensive understanding improves internal validity, by its very nature it limits the external validity and generalizability of the findings to other similar groups.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### Introduction

These findings are derived from the interviews and participant observation with the respondents. The questions in the interview guide were used, as is recommended by Patton (1990), as an analytical framework from which to describe and analyze these data. Data are organized in such a way to provide the reader with answers to the following six research questions:

- 1) What are the psychosocial effects of poverty on the respondents and their families?
- 2) What are the social and financial supports that the respondents utilize to live on a limited income?
- 3) What survival strategies have the respondents developed to continue to live on poverty level income?
- 4) What do the respondents perceive to be the causes of their poverty? From the respondents' perspective, does the culture of poverty or the structural/opportunity theory of poverty provide a better explanation of their situation? Or do they see other factors that promote poverty among the working poor population?
- 5) What are the barriers that prevent the respondents from exiting poverty?
- 6) What are the personal, social, economic and/or political changes that the respondents believe will have to be made to improve the lives of working poor people?

In addition, a typology of rural working poor people is developed to identify both the similarities and differences among various groups of working poor people.

### Psychosocial Effects of Poverty

There are two major aspects to this theme. First, there are the biological, psychological and sociological effects of poverty on the respondents. Secondly, there are the tactics that the respondents have devised to help them cope with this psychosocial stress.

The psychosocial stress of poverty is quite encompassing. First, there is the depression. A former coal miner talks about what it was like for him after he lost his job, which was subsequently replaced with a string of part-time, minimum wage positions:

It was just, ah, I don't know how you'd really explain it except to say, you know, a lot of depression. A lot of sleepless nights, layin' ya know and knowin', well my kids, can't have shoes or clothes. Even the simplest things now, we say hey, we ain't got the money. Like I say, it's still many nights, ya know. It's just like the first day you lost your job. Maybe you go through it 3 or 4 nights. Maybe some bill or the taxes are up and ya know, you think, dog gone, another nail in the coffin. And ah, I don't know...It's just, I, I don't know, we never really had anyone really close to us die in the family, but it's got to be a little bit on that order, but ya know, it takes a long time to heal and get over.

His wife goes on to say:

It destroyed his morale. Ya know, he was useless, he was a nobody, ya know, but after 2 years he's kind of comin' out of it a little bit.

The researcher asked a welder in a plant how it felt to have his wife and he working so hard yet still not be able to get ahead. He replied:

Personally, it makes me depressed even going to work. It makes me feel like I'm doin' it for nothin'. Really, I'm talkin' about my kids and not having different things that they want or different things that other kids have. It gets me depressed...at times it makes me feel like I don't even wanna work.

Many of the parents are depressed due to their inability to provide their children with adequate clothes and financial support.

The biggest depression for me is...well if it was just me I wouldn't give a hoot, but its' my kids that suffer.

Well, kids they don't understand anyway. If one of their friends gets a new toy, they'd like to have a new toy. If they get the latest style in shoes, right away they want it. The latest fashions cost big money and this is when you

start to get depressed when you can't get it for them. Because I feel at least once or twice a year, at the beginning of the school year and at Christmas time, two times out of the year, you should be able to at least go ahead and get him (the son) what he wants at least twice out of the year because any other time, he ain't gonna get nothin'.

I can't even co-sign for my son's loan because I ain't got it. It's not that I don't have credit, it's that for what I make, I'm on the list. Because I owe too much for what I make. So they don't accept my credit. You know, so I can't even help em in that fashion. And that's sad. And my parents was always there for me. They didn't give me things, but whenever I needed something to support me and back me up it was never a problem. And I can't do that for my kids and that's what's painful. I give them their basic needs.

Then there is the anxiety and worry. They worry about disconnection notices and not being able to pay their bills. For some of them the stress of it all has caused physical problems.

I used to worry about a lot of things and my hair fell out. Big bald spots on my chin here and big bald spots on my head. The doctor said it was worry and stress. I guess I couldn't handle it. It was affecting me internally somehow.

It's affecting our health. Because he had this stroke worrying about how we're gonna pay our rent.

When night comes I usually have a hard time sleeping cause there's a lot on my mind. It has brought me to the point of thinking that I was having a heart attack. It put me in coronary care twice. It caused me to have a heart cath which was no treatment. But that's where it got me. And the doctor said, "It's nothing but stress." He did the heart cath, and he says, "Willa, there's nothing there...and he says, "It's stress." He says, whatever is causing it, you have to find a way...he says, get counseling. Find something as an outlet.

There's too much stress when it comes to ah, ah, this daily, where are you gonna get the money to pay this and that. Ya know, the people, your utility people, they want their money. The people that you rent from they want their money. Everybody wants their...and there's no sympathy with those people. They do not give a care. They want their money and they don't give a care what you do.

I'm worried about paying the rent.

He (her husband) gets really discouraged and worried about the money.

They worry about not being able to provide for their children.

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I knew my son was not the type that would ever go on to college but I know my daughter will. She's very gifted and now I worry about will she be able to make it. You know, will she have the choices that she should have had because of her abilities or will they be limited because of our income. I worry about that now.

They worry about returning to school, at a time when many of their own children will be attending college along side of them. A former coal miner now working as a litter control supervisor states:

And I find myself, just the mental stress is just so much more bearing than physical. You know how it is. You go home from the mines, even if you double over or work for a few hours. You go over, kick back a couple of hours and you're ready to go again...with the mental it just never ends. It is a hassle, I mean, I'll be the first to guarantee you that it is a hassle. Plus the age, plus just the fact that I thought I had no confidence in myself. I thought, shit, I never even took college prep, you know, I can't do this...go on to college. But I find myself..I spend more time studying, you know, since I went...than I did my whole 8th grade through 12th grade in high school, you know.

There is the hurt that comes from not being able to spend more time with their children because of the long hours on the job. A single parent mother who works as a bookkeeper:

You know it hurts when you come home and your kids are already in bed and you don't get to see em. You get up and the next morning and they're sleepin'. You go to work and you don't see em till Sunday, ya know. Then they hate you for it. They don't want to live like that and you can't blame em. And what are you supposed to do? Let em go hungry? They'll hate you even more.

There is the pain of having to watch their children work to support the family. The spouse of a working poor person:

It really hurts to know that your son has to go out and work 40 hours a week just to provide necessities.

It hurts when the respondents cannot provide their children with the little extras.

It's tough when you see the ice cream truck pull up in front of the house and all their little friends are around the ice cream truck getting ice cream and they run up to you and say dad, give me money so I can get ice cream, and you can't give em no money. That hurts. That's tough right there.

Because it hurts to see your kids without. And you do without and you can't take care of yourself and you can't be in good shape to take care of them.

The hardest thing for me and I'm already starting to feel that queazy butterfly just thinkin' about Christmas. How I'm gonna buy...the oldest it's bad enough for them, but the little ones they don't understand. Christmas is magical to them and Santa is supposed to bring presents, anything they want.

And it hurts to stand in welfare lines. A litter control specialist states:

That last food line up in Wilson...that's where your pride hurts you a little bit. When I go up there I hang my head. You're standing with the lowest people.

They are also tired. Interestingly, they are mostly tired of telling their children no when they want something.

...you get tired of telling them no all the time. But, ya know, they've never really had a lot anyway. They don't remember what it was like when we were workin' in that good job so they don't have a lot to compare it to.

You know the hardest part of it all? Is when your kid comes to you and wants something and you'd like to give it to him but you have to say no we can't afford it.

They are angry and frustrated by their inability to get ahead.

I get angry. I get angry about the things I can change, but it don't change in my direction fast enough.

It just makes me angry and makes me frustrated, you know. Cause you know it's just hard. You try to get ahead and everything and it seems like every time you get a step forward you end up two steps behind.

But I just feel the only thing that gets me mad or disgusted is that I just think and stuff like that at...I can't understand when you go to work and you're trying to do something and nothing ever works out. That's what gets me mad.

There is the fighting and arguing over money that goes on between marital couples. And the striking out at the one closest to you when you hate your job.

I think its more affected us (her and her spouse) arguing about money. That's how they're (the children) affected. We argue whenever and wherever.

He'll (her husband) say I'm sorry I'm yelling at you. I just hate this job so much. He's called me up a few times and threatened to come home. And I'll tell him, if you come home don't come home because I can't take it with you on welfare. (When he was laid off) it was just so depressing and his nerves were so bad. He would be in and out of the house 40-50-60 times a day. In and out, in and out, in and out and eat constantly. He was always in the refrigerator. I mean I thought we were going to get a divorce. I mean our marriage was really bad.

The researcher asked the parents how they felt being poor had affected their children. Some parents feel that being poor taught their children the value of money.

Sometimes it upsets me because I don't want them to feel that I can't ever do anything for them, but then again maybe they're learning a little bit by it.

Yea, for the better. They learned the value of money then. I said hey guys I lost my job and we're not goin' to have all this money no more and its gonna be tough and your gonna have to do without. That's the extent of it.

Other parents believe that poverty has had a great affect on their children. In one case, an ear operation could not be performed, and in another, the braces on a teenage boy had to be removed because the mother couldn't afford to make the payments. Children who come from poor families are unable to maintain the kind of wardrobe that other children do and they are conspicuous in their worn or used clothing. The respondents state:

It effects them a lot. They do without a lot you know. The things they need. He has to have braces. Couldn't afford to pay for those, ya know. I had to get them taken off, 2400 dollars for braces, you can't afford that. He (the other son) was supposed to have an operation, can't afford that...for his ear. He's got bad ears. He's got a perforated ear drum. Can't get that done cause we can't afford it, ya know.

It's hurtin' him (her son) real bad. For one thing, ya know, every year he can see where his classmates go on vacation. He stays around the house. And he's not able to go and do things. He has clothing but it's not all those nice clothes that the kids all go out..ya know fashionable clothes. And he has to do without a lot of stuff. He doesn't really say too much.

The respondents talk about their children being embarrassed and ashamed to bring friends home:

I can remember this one (son) coming home and saying, Are we poor? It was so cluttered up over there. The apartment was so tiny, like in their bedrooms there were just boxes everywhere. When we moved from the house we had to give a lot of things away, but there were just some things



that I refused to part with. So they would be ashamed to bring friends home.

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It was the first year in my life that we didn't have a Christmas tree and they didn't want their friends to come over to the house because we didn't have a tree.

And they have a fit when I mention yard sale clothes, because I usually manage to get them something. But they don't want to wear yard sale clothes because they're afraid somebody is going to recognize what they've got on and it was theirs. They hate it because they never had to do it before.

She's (the daughter) embarrassed to go into the store with food stamps.

Many of the children of working poor families have difficulty coming up with the money to pay for school supplies, cheerleading camps, clothing, track and football shoes, and participation fees that are required by many high school athletic programs due to their increasingly troublesome budget problems. They also can't afford to buy senior pictures, class rings, graduation announcements and attend school proms.

Well, I can say that it can't be easy on them because my one daughter is in cheering and she has to have money for cheering and she's gonna go away for camp and the other daughter is in track. It isn't easy.

The older they get the more needs they have and now that she's a senior she'll have senior pictures and proms, and you know it's just more stress. I try not to let it get me down but you can't help but think about it.

Most of the older children the researcher met will not accept the free lunches at the high schools for low-income families because of the stigma and embarrassment associated with doing so. So their families pay for the regular lunches to preserve the dignity of their high school age children.

Children in poor families live in a world of uncertainty. Will we eat tomorrow? Are we going to starve? Will we have to move again? Will we have to leave all our friends? This list of uncertainties is endless in the homes of working poor children.

I'll never forget when we told Billy. He was nine years old, when he got laid off and this is when all the shows about Africa and the starving and everything and I'll never forget he said, "Are we gonna be like the Africans? He was just so afraid we were gonna starve to death. I'll never forget that. Oh, we're gonna be like the Africans. He was just so afraid. I said Billy, you know your grandparents will never let us starve to death.

Well, our two older sons, they're the ones that's gonna pay. Cause they're never gonna know that security of mom and dad having a job, you know. They knew it in the past, but kids don't look at it that way.

The tactics that the respondents used to cope with this psychosocial stress are extensive. One of the most prevailing tactics utilized by the respondents to cope with the psychosocial stressors was the way in which they chose to view the world with a focus only on the present and the problems at hand.

There's been a couple of nights when we had no idea what we were going to have for supper and the Lord came through because someone would call say they would like my husband to come and mow a yard tonight and it would be ten bucks that would at least get us through that night. You have to live one moment at a time. You cannot worry about tomorrow. That's the only way you can live. You go to bed at night and you don't know just what to expect that day.

You get so you don't worry about tomorrow. You make it through today. I don't like to think about tomorrow.

I never plan ahead. When I get there, that's when I think about it.

I think you stress yourself out if you try to plan long term and if it doesn't...if you just kind of live each day as it comes and do the best you can with each day you don't get down much. And if you set these great expectations and then they fall through you just keep diggin' a deeper hole for yourself.

Some of the respondents admit to drinking alcohol in an attempt to relieve the stress in their lives.

I yell at the kids, I don't know. I do drink a lot. That relieves a lot of the stress, ya know. Uh, I drink a lot and I watch TV.

I bitch a lot and I drink beer cause the next day it's there. That's, you know, just the way I do it.

Other respondents take medication to relieve the anxiety and depression they suffer.

It wears me out. I've been to counselors for depression. Been on medication and you can't afford the medication so you can't take it. So you have to deal with it.

I used not to be able to go to sleep without some nerve pill...And one day I said you know this is stupid...and now I don't worry about it. I just go to bed at night and go to sleep and I can do it. I don't lay and talk and lay and talk and turn and my stomach would just roll and you just and that's when you think when all the lights are out and the kids are in bed.

For some people they isolate themselves in an attempt to shelter themselves from the powerlessness over their environment.

Emotionally I'm constantly crying. I isolate myself. I don't like to be in crowds. I keep to myself a lot of things I should have said before. I just don't say. Physically, I make myself ill.

More or less I just go off and sit by myself, that's all. I think about it and I tell myself I can't do nothing about it. My wife, she's the same way. The only thing I say is I gotta keep trying.

Other respondents report talking to their spouses and family about the problems as a way of venting frustration and anger over their financial situations.

Together we will survive whatever comes our way as long as we stay together. That's the thing that keeps our heads above water.

We're closer. It makes you stronger. I married him for him, not his money. I'll go through whatever he goes through.

When we was laid off and didn't have any money, we're probably closer then ever.

One respondent reported that his wife divorced him after he lost his good paying job in the coal mines making good money. Other respondents report cases of families breaking up after losing their jobs in the coal mines. Suicide is an option for some.

Another guy, you can't talk to him 'cause he hung himself. He was getting ready to lose the house and he couldn't cope with it anymore. Hung himself in the garage. I saw it in the Sunday obituaries. We just hadn't seen each other since we got laid off.

But most of the respondents in this study persevere in the face of difficulty.

I just can't see, I mean. I've never got to the point of depressed to say well how can anybody hang theirself, shoot theirself over something like this. It's just an easy way out.

I did at first. Very much so until I started to counseling. No, I don't see it as that bad now. It was the mental health center. In fact I'm still going. They had me at the highest rated for catastrophe. I don't know what I'm rated now. I had suicidal thoughts. I think my daughter was the main reason I didn't do it.

Some respondents spend money as a means of relieving the stress of never having any money to spend.

...when you get a little extra (money) you splurge a bit. You get the things you want. If you can't get it you just have to wait until you can. Because you don't have anything and you figure well here's my opportunity to get something...But I think it's a way that you can get something that you always wanted and you just figure that somewhere down the road I'll find the money. We'll worry about it when the bills come and it comes time to pay it. You don't worry about it when you see something you want and you've got this little plastic card and it's like here. The rich can buy what they want. They look at something they see it, they want it, fine they get it. But for us it's a matter of we want it and you give us a little plastic card and we'll buy it.

Still other respondents report that walking, bowling and even work can be seen as a place to relax and get away from it all. A waitress states that it's better than "looking at the same old walls." Some people interviewed admit to being angry and depressed, while others express feelings of hopelessness.

I'll never get out of debt. The reason why is because I never make enough money. So long as I feel that you can face that, just go ahead and do your best. They can't take what you ain't got.

I don't care anymore. I feel different than I did 10 years ago. I liked material things, new cars, etc. Now a days I don't care. If the mortgage company wants this house then they can have it. I don't care anymore. I'm beyond the point of carin'. You just struggle and fight so long and you just, I haven't given up. I just don't care anymore whether I got the new house anymore.

I don't know. You just sit around and be depressed that's all. That's all there is. Then you get mad at each other and argue with each other. Ah, but we get through it, I guess. We have no alternative other than to get through it and stuff like that. Sitting around and worrying about things, and what we're going to do about it. It's not going to solve nothing. The problem's still going to be there. Know what I mean? The only thing you're gonna have to do is just weed it out for yourself. Just do the best you can do. That's the way I feel.

You don't. It's always there. Stress is always there and there is nothing you can do to relieve it.

For some of the respondents they turned to God when their lives became unmanageable.

And then you just pray to God every day that nothing else goes wrong. There is no free money to say let's go do this or go do that. You're going to be hurting yourself someplace else when you do. And a lot of times you just get to the place that you have to do that to keep your sanity.

I'm like God'll take care of it. Don't worry about it. We'll make it through.

Five years ago we couldn't quit worrying about the financial problems. But since we have both started believing that the Lord's gonna take care of us, yes we can. And before you might as well forget it. We went off the deep end.

Finally, working on cars or hunting helped other respondents to relieve the stress of their situations.

The only thing that keeps me goin' is that I love to hunt. I raise rabbit dogs. I love to rabbit hunt, deer hunt, squirrel, just whatever it is. Just love to be out in the woods. I just love bein' out in the woods.

### Support System

The most predominant category of support for the respondents in this study that emerged from the data was that of family and friends. The second most highly regarded source of support was the church. Finally, the governmental sponsored services such as the welfare system was the most talked about, least used, and most negatively viewed of all three support systems. There were also some minor sources of support from the local business community. In addition, there were some respondents in the study who did not feel that they had anyone to turn to for help and assistance in a time of need.

For most of the respondents the family was the primary support system. Family provides them with short term loans or grants. They help them repair their cars, buy them food, co-sign for loans, take them on vacations and provide them with Christmas presents.

Other than family, I don't know anybody.

Oh, I borrowed some (money) from my sister, mom and dad. If we'd go to buy and wasn't sure if we had enough to write a check we'd run there and say can we have a \$100. He'd (dad) work on my car and stuff and not charge me. But once I went back to work he was one of the first guys that was paid.

Well, last month we had a fire and the fire was over there by my fish aquariums. They say it was caused by my fish aquariums. We stayed with my mom and dad...and they just let us stay there until we could move back in. And I was out of work there right before the fire back in November. Things started gettin' a little rough there and family members just jumped in and gave us a hand. They gave us a little bit of money to buy food, ya

know, give me money to put food on the table for the child, plus my wife and me. But ah, everytime it seems that I turn around and need some help, the family is always there.

Last year was our favorite Christmas of all and his cousin gave it to us. His cousin knew that we were down and out and he'd been in a motorcycle wreck and he had come into some money and he bought over a thousand dollars to us and that's how we had Christmas.

Increasingly family members are not able to help one another because of their own personal and financial problems that prevent them from providing assistance to others.

It used to be that in rural communities people took care of each other. Well, now the one's that were taking care of others are suffering too. So it's just getting to the point that they can't take care of one another anymore.

My family, I have a brother...He's for his family and living. I have a sister and she's the same way. Her son has leg problems. He was in a motorcycle accident. She has her own expenses and her own family. His mother and father are both living. They have medical expenses and they're not in good health at all. So really you just don't have anybody.

Not financially, cause really they're not very well off.

My grandmother doesn't have it. My parents don't have it. They're just like us. Every dime they make they have sent out.

Despite having few resources of their own some of the respondents still felt obligated to help other family members when necessary. A farmer states:

There were times we didn't have much but we would give my mom money to help her.

The respondents who were married relied heavily upon their spouses to keep their spirits up when they became depressed.

But the thing is it seemed to always work out when I was down, she'd get me back up. When she was down, I'd get her back up. We worked at it. That was our main goal. First thing we sat down and talked about. Lot of divorces when you lose your job with no money, we're not gonna fight over money. I said if we don't have it we'll work around it and we're not gonna fight. I said it ain't worth it ruining everything for money. And that's about the way it went.

I depend on my wife a lot. That's about all.

I don't trust anybody around here to help me with my problems. Nobody. She already knows my problems and she helps me and that's all I need.

Friends are a major source of support. They provide the respondents with money, food, emotional support, recreation, Christmas presents, and labor for the completion of projects around the house. The respondents talk about the financial support:

In a rural area more people know ya and they know your situation and they know if they can help you they will. They will give you 20 dollars to get some groceries or come down and get something out of the garden, or ah, you know, anything we can do for you because they know their needs and you're going to help them if you're ever able to.

I'm going on this field trip with the kids and I'm going to buy their lunch, (a friend says) don't worry about it (she buys the kids their lunch). And it's just like you can't...you don't know what to say to people that do stuff like that because there's nothing...thanking's not enough.

If we need a few dollars we'll borrow it off of friends.

While I was off (sick)...all the guys in the shop took up a collection for me and they made my car payment that month. And there's not that many guys in there so you know they had to give a good amount and that meant more to me than anything I guess during that time.

Friends provide the respondents with food to help them when there is a shortage of money to buy groceries.

He (her husband) was up at dad's helpin' mow the day they brought the groceries and I was up in my room cleanin' and Holly hollered out that Debbie Sue was here and I thought, now what's she doin' here? I come out and she said we've got groceries for ya and I said you've got what? She said we've got groceries for ya and I said well I'm not gonna argue and she said that's what I wanted to hear and they brought em in.

At Christmas time when he was laid off and we had no Christmas dinner, it came by her (her friend). They do it every year for three families. It's their way of saying thank you for what we have and giving it to someone else. To come in with a complete Christmas dinner, the ham, the potatoes, the pie, the cake...she brought it all. She's rare. She's truly a rare person.

But most of all they depend on friends for emotional support when things get bad.

When we first came back here I went through a very very difficult time right after we moved back here. But I just did not think I was going to make it you know if it wouldn't have been for friends that you could pick up the phone and no matter what they were doing they'd drop everything and talk to you. They'd drop everything to come over.

Friends. Definitely friends. You know they have been big supports on the emotional side. You know, if you're having a bad day and it's just more

than you can handle you can pick up that phone and call a friend and they'll listen and you know, let you know that they are there and that's a big help. If we were out in California and you had a bad day that was hard for us because we were dependent on each other to pick each other up and when we were both down there was nobody to turn to.

I got a friend we'll drink a beer or two once in a while and we'll talk about problems.

Recreation is often provided by friends.

There's a lot of things we don't have. If it wasn't for the help of other people we wouldn't be able to go to a movie, go bowling... A lot of friends are helping me. They make sure I have what I need and that we get other extra things. For Christmas we didn't have any Christmas tree or lights and one of the lady's at the church, she got the Christmas tree and brought it along with the bulbs and the decorations and they brought presents for us and the whole works. It was real nice. They've been my biggest source of help I guess you'd say.

Additionally, the local church groups are a major support for the respondents.

And the church they even bought us groceries one year and bought the kids real nice toys and stuff.

They just called one day and said we heard you need a car and we want to give it to you. So...there aren't too many people that are going to give you a car without strings attached. And our living room suit. People we hardly knew. The biggest part of our stuff that was given to us was by friends from the church.

The church was there anytime we needed them, but I don't like to take off of them. Now if I was really destitute I wouldn't hesitate, just go to church and say can you help me out. Like I said the church is there if we need it. One time they made an interest payment on our house.

I think the church has given me the most. They have given me a little bit of money. They've given me most of my kitchen supplies, my pots and pans, cups and towels and so on and so forth.

I just figured the good Lord was looking after me. But hey, our church gave us money, gave us food.

The church has given us baskets, ya know, what we call food baskets, different kinds of food items in the basket. And there was a time when I was out of work and they had the funds so they gave me a couple of dollars until I got some money.

The church is really...Being in the church is a big help. There's a mechanic, there's the guy who owns tires, the guy that owns the insurance company that we have insurance through. He's paid the insurance premium before and then we paid him back a month or two later. Sometimes people come through for you.



Many of the respondents would prefer to avoid using government services or programs and some feel they have been the least helpful, while others complain about being ineligible for most of the services. The respondents were asked the following question:

Who do you trust around here to help you?

Um, family, close friends, but as far as the government I'd rather not deal with them if I don't have to.

I don't know. I just don't ask for any help. I don't think...well, ya know, family's gonna help you, but asking other people I don't want to ask them. I don't think your social programs will help you anyway, because I've had run arounds with them.

I tried that one time (to apply for food stamps and was rejected) and I figured if we're gonna do it ourself, then let's do it.

A bus aide complains about the government agencies:

I think the government has been the least helpful. As far as the needs and where to go for help. I think it has been individuals. The church has been terrific. Of course my friend I was talking about. He's been able to get me information as to where to go and who to talk to. Just a few individuals helped me the most. But the government agencies don't come knockin' on your door sayin' hey look this is available for you.

A bookkeeper complains of being ineligible for most government assistance programs:

I'm too qualified for any agency help. You might make 10 or 15 dollars more than your supposed to so your automatically out. I tried to apply for food stamps when the kids were home and I was turned down. I tried to get medical benefits for them too, but nope. I wasn't eligible for that neither, ya know. I'm not eligible for anything.

However, over time most of the respondents had utilized some type of program to help them through the periodic episodes of unemployment, low hours or financial crisis. The respondents reported utilizing commodities, food stamps, Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Pell grants, unemployment, rental assistance, and the Home Energy Assistance Plan (HEAP). Food stamps was the most commonly mentioned program that was used by the respondents. AFDC is the second most often mentioned program.

It is important to note that there was evidence of some highly altruistic acts performed by some of the local businessmen to assist respondents that were having a

difficult time paying their bills. Several talked about being able to obtain credit from the local business community when no one else would help. A retail clerk states:

I don't have money, but I have credit and they trust me. I've been able to maintain my same feeding habits, which I would not have been able to do if the grocer had not given me credit. I have a little store bill and I pay on it. I never pay it off. They never bother me. Even gas I can get on credit if I want to. I've been able to maintain because I have built my credit back up and even when I fell with my bankruptcy.

In another remarkable story a dentist refuses to let a working poor couple remove their daughter's braces because they cannot afford to continue to pay for them.

Angie had braces on and when we came back we took her to the orthodontist to have him take them off because we just could not afford to have him keep them on and keep makin' payments. And she's now getting free orthodontics work because the orthodontist said, uh, uh. I'm not taking them off. You won't see a bill. I want to finish her...and that's not too often you're going to find somebody that's going to do that. He said it's between us but I'm not taking them off. I want to finish her.

### Survival Strategies

The range of survival strategies utilized by the respondents to make it on a limited income without resorting to complete welfare dependency is extensive and unique. For example, the researcher met a staff person of a local community action agency who earned poverty level wages yet was the sole supporter of her husband and two children. She lived on a 37 acre farm in the hills and she hunted, fished and sewed to make ends meet. She told the researcher that she started hunting when she was 34 years old. She stated that she did not believe in poaching or trophy hunting. She hunted deer or rabbit for only one reason and that was to put food on the table to meet the needs of her family. In her words she said, "I shoot em, I skin em, and we eat em." A 25 year old, saw mill worker talks about hunting as a way to help reduce the expenses of food:

We eat a lot of deer meat through winter. I think I could take 2-3 deer and that would do me for winter. That helps out to not have to buy meat and stuff.

They are an excellent example of the pioneer spirit that is still very much alive in many of the people of southeastern Ohio and their ability to "make do" with whatever resources are at their disposal.

In many of the families the primary wage earner works multiple jobs and often times the spouse and children work to supplement the primary wage earner's income.

I'd cut the neighbor's grass. Make about 11 bucks. Cigarette money and pop money for the kids.

During the week he farms and then on Saturday and Sunday we go down and lay carpet.

I did work at a funeral home a few times. I still do that on the side.

He does custodial work and that and so while there's school going on he gets extra work there, plus my baby sitting for teacher's kids and so only during school time we do alright. And then in the summer when we're down to just his income the boys worked this summer, but I would not touch their money. I had my son put gas in the car a couple of times. He's sixteen years old and he's needing that money for himself. Now he's wanting to date.

Something always comes along. He's going to be working more than 16 hours a day next week. I don't know how he's gonna sleep. He'll be working as a night watchman at the fair. I'm not sure how he's going to do that because he's got to work 10 to 6 night watchman, 8 to 4 litter control and then the litter control says he has to come back out to the fair 4 to 7.

And I mow yards. I've got extra yards to mow. Like I say, with all the jobs there are just not enough hours and you still can't make ends meet.

We do a lot of different things. My wife cleans houses and so on. And about the only thing I still play music and that's something to do to bring in money and I depend on that a lot just to help put bread on the table, but that's something I enjoy.

She does ceramics and stuff. All that arts and crafts stuff. Believe it or not it helps. A lot of times that was what was buying our groceries.

My wife does crafts, does hair, does a perm, that's 20 bucks, things like that. We clean a couple of apartments a week, that's 10-15 bucks, but hey it's 15 bucks. It's gas money.

There is a lot of small jobs I try to pick up. Ya know, workin' this for six months. I work in the oil fields for a guy, off and on. Diggin' ditches and layin' line. Just whatever you can find. There's a plenty of odd jobs ya know out there, but there ain't enough hours in the day, you just can't do enough odd jobs to make any money. Ya know, payin' minimum wage, 4 dollars.

Most of the respondents relied upon family or friends at one time or another to help them out of a crisis with a temporary loan. A few drove long distances out of the area to work to earn their living driving truck, laying carpet and working in another coal mine for a period of time. Several of the respondents lived with their families to make ends meet. All of the respondents, in one way or another talked about doing without, be it clothes, cars, washing machines, dental or medical care. Bargain hunting is a real skill which many of these families utilize to stretch their income. Clothes are purchased from yard sales, the Salvation Army, and retail outlet stores. They buy food in bulk to save money.

The biggest part of the way I stretch the budget is I try to be very economical food wise because the cost of food can be very disastrous. There is no buying shrimp. Your expensive cuts of meat. We found, it's like a grocery warehouse. I buy in bulk. Like the big package of toilet paper, 24 rolls. Hell, I'm good for a couple of months. Ya know, cause, otherwise, it'll turn around and nickel and dime you. You run to the stores for a little bit of this and a little bit of that. I go to the bread stores. Cause once you freeze it and thaw it it's just as soft as what it was before they brought it in there. That's how you try to get ahead. You buy in bulk. We watch for the sales, coupons. If I'm able to use them I use them a lot.

Well, my mother was a very thrifty person. In fact they called her cheap. And I had wonderful experience in her cheapness if they want to call it that. But I call it surviving. And I mean she taught me how to do things and I would cook up big batches of greens in September. I had all my vegetables in the freezer and I had meat in her freezer. The only thing we had to go to the store for was bread and juice.

You don't do. You save your pennies and you buy generic brands of cigarettes. Buy generic types of food...go to Hills to buy your kids clothes and Value City. They have nice clothes and they're on sale and they're a little cheaper. Buying a lot of stuff that's on sale.

A retail clerk makes an interesting observation about price inflation and the best time for working poor people to buy at the grocery stores:

Most stores increase their prices at the first of the month especially the grocery stores. Now that hurts the working poor as well as the welfare person. They increase their prices...we don't buy the first two weeks (of the month). Because they increase their prices and they drop them back down at the middle of the month, at the end of the month you can buy anything 15-20 cents cheaper. This is another way of robbing you again without a gun and keeping you...unless you're smart enough to know the average person has to take on a study of when to buy...I will not go into the store until the 20th. Because everything is higher.

To further save money respondents use wood cut from the surrounding forests to fuel their stoves to cut back on the heating bills, can vegetables, participate in baby sitting co-ops, develop a basic menu, eat one meal a day, and try to conserve on utility costs wherever possible. They work opposite shifts to share child care responsibilities and save money. They work on their own automobiles instead of paying the high cost of professional auto care. They buy used parts to fix their cars.

The respondents sometimes have to resort to creative ways to pay their bills until the next paycheck arrives.

I stretch my budget by writing a check at the grocery store and having them hold it until the next time I get paid.

When you need food, when it comes to Wednesday I will write a little check, jump in my car, go to West Virginia and buy the groceries that I need. The check that I write over there will take a couple of days to get here. One of these days I'm gonna get caught. I have had two bounce. Then you have to pay another 5 dollars which isn't fun, but that's the way I make it.

And just like tomorrow morning I've got a house payment due and I don't have the money yet. It's supposed to take a week to process this check and if we're to take the check up on Monday, and hopefully it won't get back here till Friday, ya know, in order for him to have a pay check there.

When I do I'll pay one bill and let another one go. And then the next month I'll pay that one and let another one go. You know what I mean. Pay the electric one month and phone the next month and something like that, ya know. That's how I do it.

We pay the closest thing that is past due when we get our check.

In an emergency most of the respondents have developed ways to raise emergency funds.

The man that owns the funeral home owns this building and so we work out a little deal there. I pay \$200 and if I work there I can deduct it from my rent.

I can go and buy my grandmother food (with food stamps) and she will give me the cash.

I've done house cleanin' for people before, but they're hard to come by these days. I've sold things. Things I've got around here. I'm considerin' sellin' my washer and dryer right now to have my water turned on. I've sold my weddin' ring. Sold everything.

Welfare don't know I got all these cars. If they did they'd probably take the food stamps, but you can make extra money with these cars. You know somebody needs parts, radiator 40 bucks, starter 20, alternator another 20.

Making do, making things last and doing without are ways in which the respondents survive on a limited income. Making do is characterized by the following:

I have a certain amount of clothes but I do with what I have. I may have so many shirts, couple pair of pants and a couple pair of shirts or something like that. If you mix you can make so many different outfits.

My cars all got over 100,000 miles on them. I'd like to have a new one, sure.

She has to fill the old washing machine by hand with water and they drive cars until they break down and can't be fixed.

To make things last, the respondents state:

I've used the same razor blade for months now. Stupid little things. Anything you can do to save a dime.

This old couch with the cover falling off, it's probably gonna have to last another 6, 7 years or however long.

And they do without. They do without new clothes, home repairs, vacations, time with one another, food, water service and car insurance.

Myself I kind of wear out a pair of pants or something until I can't wear it no more and then I go get another pair.

Basically repairs on our home which are out of our means right now. The fact that there's no vacation time and not a lot of recreation or family things because of his job he works away from home. He isn't there to help with the family atmosphere.

I ain't got no 507 dollars (to have the water service connected). Till I can save up I'll do without. By the time they add the surcharge for the man to come out here and check the meter. Then they have to come back and put it in. They have to adjust it and there's a service charge for all that. So we've been hauling (water) since March.

We don't have car insurance because we just can't afford it.

Hand-me-downs are a common survival strategy for the respondents' families.

Clothes and furniture are passed from family to family and down through each family from the oldest to the youngest.

Like these pants here my sister-in-law gave to me. She got em from somewhere and they wouldn't fit her boyfriend and she gave them to me.

...My brother gave us that couch. The next door neighbor gave us the chair. Two of them chairs was given to us. We just got three new beds that the church gave to us.

Hand me downs. This was given to me. A friend of mine has some tops. She gave me a winter coat. My sister sends me a lot of stuff.

The children mow yards, work for the Joint Partnership Training Act (JPTA), deliver newspapers, and baby sit to pay for their car insurance, school clothes, senior pictures, graduation announcements, and "whatever else comes up."

Some of the respondents find that there are periods of time when they have to live with other family members to make ends meet.

We were living with mom and dad before we found this house. We just couldn't afford the apartment that we had before.

We lived with her mom and dad quite a bit.

A waitress talks about the fact that she and her husband are so poor they cannot afford to get a divorce because of their financial problems.

Our marriage is not very stable. It's like every day someone is hollering for a divorce and one of the reasons why we probably don't get a divorce is that we can't afford it. Neither one of us can afford to live alone. I can't afford to work without him here to watch the kids. He can't afford to live on his own and we can't afford a divorce period. So we do the best we can with what we got. If I move back in with my mom that is the only way I can make it.

A small number of the respondents are using Pell grants to return to school in an attempt to upgrade their work skills and education so they are more employable. A litter control specialist's wife comments about the decision for her husband to go back to school:

All of a sudden I just got kind of serious and said, "You've got a big decision to make mister. We either leave here or you go to school." I said, "There's no option... And then the Lord kind of just opened everything up after that to kind of fall into place."

Some have considered moving away to another area even though they generally don't want to. Others have slowly seen their materialistic attitudes change because of a lack of opportunity. Many rely on prayer to get them through the tough times:

You pray that your washer holds out and because, ya know, there's no way that you can fix it. Our TV blew up a year ago and thank God we had a little portable to take the place of that because I don't know what they'd do without it.

### Contributing Factors

From some respondents' perspective the causes of their poverty are multiple and complex due to the changing economic structure of the region. The most common response to the question of why they were having such a difficult time making it was because of a lack of opportunity caused by structural unemployment and the decline of the local industrial economy. The respondents talk about the changing economy:

Well, in my opinion the valley is dying. If you don't work in the steel mill, the coal mine, or the railroad, the other jobs are supported by these. So, I mean, he (her husband) sold life insurance for 20 years. Ok, how many times can you sell life insurance to somebody? There's many people leaving the area. There's no one coming in...There are welfare people. If they get a \$10 a month policy, they're doing good. That is what forced him away from here the first time.

You know, when I got out of the service the first time, there was a lot of jobs around here. The good payin' jobs. The mines were boomin'. The steel mills, the plants, I often wish now that when the other plants was hirin' that I would have left the mine to do that, but I had about 10 years in there.

A bookkeeper in a non-profit agency talks about the low wages:

I have no security. In this area there are no other jobs to apply for so you have to stay where you're at. And you can't make it, ya know. I work for a non-profit agency. I always have. And that's tough. I've got to work for 4 dollars (an hour)...and to get a good job you've got to know somebody or something.



There aren't any jobs available. I am putting applications everywhere. I'm waiting...I'm doing clerking jobs rather than just sitting home and waiting.

Other respondents comment on the lack of opportunity in their rural communities:

And I think that's why a lot of people that live here on welfare and stuff because there aren't enough jobs and a lack of opportunity.

But really if everybody stayed in this area I can't imagine how everybody could have jobs because there just aren't that many jobs here.

We don't have the right to go get that job, because there's not the job.

Depressed area that we're living in. Not many jobs available and the one's you do get that have decent wages don't have any benefits.

I think this valley is really terrible in opportunities. Because I know my ex-husband is an electrician and he couldn't find a job around here. So I mean I think they need to start opening up some opportunities and things could be better in this town.

There's not enough jobs that pays enough money.

The situation is the jobs are hard to find and this is workin' on the people's minds and causin' them to have all this heart condition and strokes and stuff and they're puttin' them down health wise.

Not only is there a lack of opportunity for older workers, but there is a lack of opportunity for the the young men and women of the community who are currently graduating from high school.

This area has nothing to offer a high school graduate. You could go into farming. Or they have to go out and go to school.

He (my son) couldn't stay here. I don't know. A lot of people in Columbus say there are jobs up there. Columbus is now booming as far as construction. If they want to stay here, they're going to have to settle for that minimum wage.

Oscar Lewis (1965) has argued that many people are poor because they have developed adaptational coping mechanisms that result in the development of character traits that prevent them from competing in a middle class world for jobs. He hypothesized that poor people who are members of the culture of poverty exhibit the traits of: individualism, traditionalism, fatalism, present-time orientation, detachment from work

and ambivalence toward education. All of these traits Lewis believed make it difficult for the poor to compete in a middle class world even when job opportunities present themselves. Many of the respondents interviewed exhibit the traits of individualism, fatalism, present-time orientation and detachment from work which are indicative of the culture of poverty. However, in most cases these character traits do not appear to be the primary cause of their poverty, but rather a coping mechanism which allows them to maintain their sense of integrity when confronted by the harsh reality of chronic poverty and a lack of opportunity. However, one respondent stood out when compared with the other respondents because she did not display any of the characteristics of the culture of poverty

Debbie is a 26 year old woman, who is recently divorced and lives with her 6 year old daughter. In January, she quit her job and went on welfare (AFDC) because her health insurance had been raised in December from 84 to 184 dollars. Debbie states, "I didn't have the money left to survive on...I mean I was working a part-time job to begin with. I could not afford that." She then made the decision to quit her job and seek support from the welfare department through the AFDC program.

This respondent is not representative of the culture of poverty theory. Debbie is constantly trying to better herself, set goals and take on new projects. When asked how she is different from the people she works with, she states:

I set goals for myself. I search for information. I'm searching for ways to get help, to get an education. I'm trying to find ways to maybe get a decent job. I don't sit back and wait for my monthly check.

She goes on to say:

I am trying to improve. I mean I want a better life. I'm not sitting back waiting for something to happen. I'm doing something to try and make something happen.

Debbie is not fatalistic. She has future goals for herself and she believes that she does have some power over her situation. She displays a positive attitude that is hopeful.

During an interview Debbie was asked the following question: What kind of situation will you be in five years from now? She replied:

I definitely won't be on welfare. Hopefully, I'll have my life more organized as far as employment and school. I'd hope that I'd at least have my bachelor's degree. I hope that my daughter will benefit from all this also.

Debbie has long term goals that she is presently working toward. She is not present-time oriented as is evidenced by this statement of her long term goals:

I want to finish college, that might take several years. Make sure my daughter gets a decent education. Eventually have a nice house...

She has a strong commitment to the world of work. She does not want to be dependent on the welfare system for her existence and is constantly applying for jobs in her community and attempting to upgrade her work skills via education.

I'm hoping that maybe I'll be able to find a decent job. I'm still taking civil service exams here and there and everywhere. I'd like to see myself off of welfare.

She believes that education is her primary vehicle for escaping a life on welfare and poverty. She has gone to school while working a job and taking care of a child on her own. She is not ambivalent about the value of education in her life.

I'm halfway to an associate degree. My goal is to be a social worker which for me I'd almost have to get a bachelors if not a master's degree.

Late in the interview the researcher asked Debbie another question. There is another theory that says that people are poor because there isn't the opportunity to not be poor; meaning there aren't enough jobs that pay enough money. What do you think? She replied enthusiastically and quickly:

I think that's my situation right now. Even at the school where I worked I was makin' \$5.57 an hour. By the time they take out retirement, taxes, medical care, I mean it goes on and on and on. I had nothing left. I didn't have enough money to survive on.

Debbie is much more representative of the structural opportunity explanation of poverty. The lack of opportunity in her life has been the primary cause of her

low-income. She is a vivid example of how the systemic forces of the socioeconomic system work to promote poverty among female-headed families in the United States. Debbie is constantly faced with the lack of opportunity due to sexual discrimination that prevents her from finding suitable employment to allow her to earn a decent wage to support herself and her daughter. It is difficult to rear a child when faced with limited resources, education, job opportunities, child care support and increasingly expensive medical insurance. All of these variables have forced this woman to resort to reliance on the welfare system to survive. She is not lazy and unmotivated. She is not irrational. She has made a rational decision based on limited options.

While most of the respondents in the study believe that the lack of opportunity theory best explains their situation, there were a few people who believed that it is their fault that they are poor.

I'm just too lazy to do something else. I want more, but I don't want it bad enough, you know. I'm kind of comfortable. My bills are paid. It bothers me that I don't have enough for extras yet it doesn't bother me enough to make me do something about it. I have no self-confidence. I mean I don't have any self-esteem for that matter either.

A secretary comments on her husband's present-time orientation that she believes has subsequently led to their current state of poverty:

Wanting to make money and not going to school, exactly. He had that job handed to him. It was waiting for him and he said why not, I'm making good money, why go to school? I think if he'd have went on. I mean he had scholarships to go to school. If he'd have gone on and went to school he could get better jobs. One that he's happier in, one that had benefits, more stability...

But a discussion of the causes of poverty for the working poor cannot end with these two causal theories. The list of causal factors based on the respondents' perceptions is extensive and many of these factors do not fit neatly into one of the major theories on

poverty. For many of the respondents there is a strong belief that discrimination prevents them from obtaining jobs, promotions and respect in the work place.

I think in this area in particular, it's not what you know, it's who you know. That's the main thing right there.

If you don't know somebody who can get you in on a good job at the plant, you might as well forget it.

If you have a lot of money and you know people there's no problem getting a state job.

The good jobs are very few and very hard to get. It seems like you gotta know somebody to get one.

Then another thing to, if you don't know the right person you might as well forget it. You cannot get a job anywhere unless you have somebody pullin' for ya.

They run an ad in the paper for a full-time maintenance person with medical benefits. The day before they put the ad in the paper they had the assistant director's son with that position filled. It's a crooked town.

A female factory worker complains about the inequities in the pay structure at the factory in which she works:

They (the men) do different job, like cut brushes. In fact, I know they get paid more than we do because they have families they have to support, but I'm supporting a family right now so I should get paid more. But they have different jobs and they'll say it's a harder job or something. I don't know. That's why they get paid more.

A bus aide believes she has a difficult time finding a job because she is a single parent mother with a child:

If you have a young child, they kind of push you aside because they don't want the complications when a child's sick. You can't come to work because of this and that. Being a single parent is a real set back for a lot of people.

A pregnant waitress feels that she was fired because she was pregnant and the employer was afraid of the liability if she was injured on the job:

Well, I'm pregnant and I'm having trouble breathing and I think they were harassing me at work. They would work me short all the time and put more work load on me. A girl fell at work and hurt the baby and they really had a

lot of complications coming out of that. So I think they were mainly afraid of that.

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While admittedly a very small sample, it is interesting to note that the two black people in the study, one male and one female, did not feel that race was the cause of their poverty.

I think that in order for a person to get a better job he has to have some kind of education as far as the job he's seeking, and in order to get that job you have to sell yourself. Like I say, if you learn to sell yourself and you can show that man that you will give him 100 percent of your time and effort then I don't feel that it is a racial issue in terms of getting the job before I will.

In a small town like this it is who you know. They don't care what color you are. If you know the right people you can get the job done. This is the reason I like small towns...So I would say it's more age for me than it would be for color. And with a master's degree I'm still held up by my age. Not many people will hire me at my age. When I go for a job I have to lie about my age because they still do have a thing about age.

For several of the respondents, age discrimination was a much more prominent theme than racial discrimination. A 42 year old carpenter sums it up best by saying:

I still think that 42 years old, they've got to look at that age. They've got to. They'll hire a 18 year old. They won't hire a 40 year old. That's my opinion anyway.

Other major areas of concern for the respondents and reasons why they believe they are poor were low wages, lack of education, the local elite, government apathy, and environmental laws and regulations. The respondents discuss the prevalent low wage economy:

I never make enough money.

It's just a thing about it. Like I say, jobs don't pay enough money, and the majority of the jobs there's no advantage. If they give you a raise and it's not enough difference, you know.

Another thing is for me to find a better job, I have to be able to survive on it. I can't survive on a \$4 an hour job. There's just no way.

I don't begrudge the owner or anyone like him who can build a business and have the things he wants, but there are times when they have the attitude, what do you mean you can't make it on this? And maybe he doesn't think, maybe he doesn't go to the grocery store and know that you

can't buy anything for less than \$2 or that you can't buy anything without costing you big bucks.

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Well, right now, in this community there are very few jobs that pay more than 4-5 dollars an hour.

Some employers bitch about that they want to increase the minimum wage, but they've got to realize that it has been this way for about 10 years now.

The reason we don't make money the owner of the saw mills, ya know, they don't pay, ya know. They'll get some dummy to stack lumber for a month or two and when he quits they'll just go grab another one. They work at it like that, ya know. They don't want nobody with an education out there. So he (the owner of the mill) makes like \$2 on each board and we put out I'd say 40,000 foot of board a day, so he makes a good bit of money and he could afford to pay his workers more but he won't do it, you know...

Many of the respondents believe that their lack of education is a major reason for their poverty:

Education. We're both high school graduates, but what the hell is that? The mills ain't hirin'. The railroads ain't hirin'. They're dead. The coal mines are dead.

Class by class, I know that I'm smart enough and bright enough and intelligent enough to get out there and do it if I just had the education.

For me to get a better job, you have to have computer skills which I don't have. And I can't afford to go back to school and get em. You go full-time how you gonna work? You know, you're stuck.

Some of the respondents believed that the local elite was the reason why economic development never occurs in southeastern Ohio. The local elite consists of county commissioners, small town mayors, sheriffs and local business leaders. Their criticisms follow:

I do not believe that things will change in this county or get any better-- not in our lifetime. I guess I see it as beating your head against a brick wall. They (the local elite) aren't going to do anything first of all. They'll run you out. They could literally run you out of town around here. They would first ostracize you so bad that you wouldn't have any desire to be here. Have you ever talked to any of the businessmen in Coal town? My husband and I were in town in a restaurant and we heard these two guys talking that they were upset because the business association in town doesn't want any businesses. They'll run them out of town, because they don't want the competition.

The banks that are here in this county have been here for a thousand years and they're not doing too bad. They're sound and they like it that way. They have the power. If you had a big corporation come in here such as General Motors or Ford, these people would be insignificant and they don't want that.

The trouble is, they (the county commissioners) don't peek over the edge. They have no idea what's going on outside, nor do they want to know. An industry wanted to move in here that would pay \$23,000 a year. And I will be honest with you there are those in this county that did not want that to happen. They didn't want to feel that they would have to start meeting that salary schedule.

You were talking about how we could get big business in here. It's been about two summers ago and some men had come to Coal Town looking for sites. They had their plans with them and they were to meet with somebody who didn't even bother to show up. It was on a Thursday and everything closes up at noon on Thursday and the men were really upset and they said, "Hell, they don't want to do anything in this god damn town," and so they left. That's sort of the way it is, it's who we have in power.

We don't have anybody who can go to bat for this county either. We've had several different opportunities for different small industries, but our commissioners they don't want no change.

This fella she was talkin' about that wanted to put the satellite plant here from Cleveland. He went and talked to the commissioners and they said hey, "I'll put the building up. I'll put the water in and the electric and the whole works and hire the people. The only thing I ask for from you is to give me a seven year tax break." Which any industry would want. But when he got to that part they said, "We're not interested in that part at this time." But look at the money in taxes and real estate and groceries and other tax dollars. They don't see that. All they see is riff raff and what do you do? That's their outlook on them.

Politics not only affects what economic development does or does not occur in southeastern Ohio, but also has an impact on who gets to have the few "state" or government jobs that politicians can hand out according to the rules of the local patronage system. A saw mill worker who now earns \$4.25 an hour was earning \$5.25 an hour working in a state park. He talks about getting and then losing his "state job" because of his "politics":

**Saw Mill Worker:** I was workin' for the state...and in politics I'm a democrat and now that the republicans took over they're kind of easin' the democrats out, you know, so that just cut that (his job) off. So that ended that.

**Researcher:** What were you doing for the state?



**Saw Mill Worker:** I split timber, picked up trash, roofed their cabins, maintenance, takin' care of the park.

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**Researcher:** Did you get that job because of your political affiliation?

**Saw Mill Worker:** Yea, I voted democrat and that's the reason I got the job...through the democrats (the county democratic chairman). Now that the republicans have taken over they're scootin' the democrats out to make room for the republicans. Just like the democrats did to them.

**Researcher:** How did they scoot you out?

**Saw Mill Worker:** Well, they just change the job title or lay you off and don't call you back, say they don't need you, and hire somebody else.

**Researcher:** Didn't you have any protection to keep them from doing that?

**Saw Mill Worker:** No, not with my job title you don't. You ain't safe until you been there at least two years so you can be certified by the state. They can get to you within 2 years unless you take a civil service test and pass it.

The respondents blame the government for much of their plight. They see the government as apathetic, ignorant, too rigid in their passing of environmental laws, and incompetent in the development of an economic plan for the region.

It has a lot to do with the government too! If the government would just stop and look at America itself. To see the downfall of poor people. Ya know, and look at themselves and see that they didn't have to go through that...and I blame the government to some point.

Other respondents are concerned about the apathetic posture of state and local government officials when it comes to bringing about constructive change in the region.

(Reference the Governor) Well, he probably could, but I just don't figure that Coal County is enough for him to have to worry about, you know. It's just a small county and there's more important things for him to worry about.

I don't think anybody cares. I don't know if anybody cares, if you want to know the truth. Most of your people don't understand, you know what I mean. For instance, people in Columbus never been on a farm and they think everything comes from a supermarket. They don't realize.

Politicians just didn't know what I was talking about. I swear they didn't. And they didn't feel that was necessary. And they really don't. Nobody knows we're here and nobody cares.

I doubt if the governor knows where Coal County is at. He doesn't care about us. The 3 C's, that's all he cares about...Columbus, Cleveland and Cincinnati. That's where the votes are at. He doesn't realize that the biggest percentage (of votes), per capita comes from Coal County.

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Many believe that the government has overstepped their authority with the new environmental laws that are closing down many of the coal mines in southeastern Ohio due to their high sulfur content.

I believe the government, especially the EPA. You know, because their rules and regulations are so strict against the coal industry that they've just put so many people out of work and they're still tryin' to do it yet to this day. The governments still got their fingers in so much stuff.

I guess I'm mad at the government because I think the economy has a lot to do with what they have done and what they haven't done in our area with the coal mines goin' down and with all the environmental issues or whatever. I know I'm concerned about the environment, but I think there are things they can do to keep people workin' and take care of the environmental issues.

The respondents are critical of the regions lack of a comprehensive economic development plan to replace the industry that has been lost:

I really don't think that we have anybody that's been working hard enough trying to sell the area.

They have zero planning at this point.

The jobs that were there...aren't here now and nothings been done to replace them.

And there are other explanations for their poverty. The micro causes consist of: the local people's resistance to change, lack of work experience, personal problems, too many children, poor budgeting, lack of transportation, loss of family support, divorce and inadequate child support. The more macro causes of poverty consist of: international competition, excessive payroll deductions, lack of benefits provided by the employer, hiring of outsiders to do contract jobs in the community, lack of economic diversification, lost wages, inadequate support structure, expensive housing, the high cost of health care, inflation, the demise of the unions, corporate greed, and insufficient hours.

On the individual level, the respondents were critical of those people that are resistant to change of any kind in their communities:

People are clannish around here and that's just the way it is. They don't like outsiders here because they don't want to change.

Because the oldest people are the oldest voters and they don't want no more change. They want it to be a retirement community. They'd rather see the kids have to graduate and leave, then have something come in here. They don't want the riff raff of industry.

A grocery store clerk talks about the dilemma of not having enough work experience:

The biggest one when you go looking for a job and you can't get the job because you don't have the experience and you can't get the experience because you can't get the job.

A few of the respondents were incapable of holding full time jobs or positions that required them to interact with a lot of people because of a personal problem such as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or schizophrenia. When asked what was the cause of his poverty, a Vietnam Veteran with PTSD states:

Probably nobody but myself. Who can I blame? I'm supposed to be a big boy. I take people too seriously. Like when I go do a job or something like that I get real defensive. I take things wrong all the time. A lot of people say piss on him.

One young woman believes that having a child before she completed her education has contributed to her financial problems. Other respondents talked about poor budgeting skills:

We started out making many mistakes. I started out at a fast food restaurant and it was pretty decent. I was assistant manager and made decent pay and we got two cars and a credit card and the next thing you know having all this credit and the next thing you know we haven't got no job and the bills keep coming.

We didn't learn how to manage money before we started making it. We got married and he started making good money and no one taught us how to manage it.

If we had planned then we wouldn't have ended up in this situation that we're in now, because there would have been money in the bank.

A significant number of the respondents believe that they are poor primarily because of their divorce and the lack of child support they receive:

After I married and got divorced, I was forced to go on welfare for a while, ya know, because I didn't have no job experience. I didn't get nothin' (from the ex-husband).

I think it's my ex-husband. Because I really think if I had him with me, then I think I could go out and at least better myself, I think. It's hard to get a babysitter when you can't afford one and if he was here helping me, I think it would be a lot different.

I think I was a victim, you know. Divorce does that to women in particular. You always grow up with the idea that you're gonna have a perfect life. You know, that the American dream was gonna be yours. I was fortunate because I was in school. I got a degree and at that point in time I substituted but I never had a permanent job and by the time I needed a job, there weren't any to have. Teachers were a dime a dozen, especially in this area. And they wanted substitutes a lot more than they wanted full time teachers. So I got put in that category and I never got out of it.

My ex-husband. There was a lot of stress and violence around us. I more or less gave up my house and all of my possessions. I didn't mean for it to happen but that's the way it happened. My lawyer was a crook as far as I'm concerned. He knew the situation but he kind of let it slide.

A female factory worker talks about what happened when she tried to get her husband to pay child support:

I'm not getting no child support. We went down to 4 days and I wasn't makin' it. Now, I'm so far behind now I don't know if I can ever get out of the hole. He threatened to quit his job if I took him back to court.

Then, there are the other macro forces which influence the economic viability of southeastern Ohio. A major concern for many of the respondents was corporate greed.

In our case it was the coal company that brought it out and their greed. I have to blame it on them before they came down there, a year before we were laid off, we broke a world tonnage record at that mine. And then the year they laid off, the next year they said well, we're not price competitive in the market.

They don't want to spend the money. All the money that's needed for research and the development, you know. Companies are just out to make money now instead of looking down the road further, I think.

The companies aren't willing to pay that kind of money anymore (to their workers). Because the economy is too unstable. They don't want to pay the high wages. They're paying us the cheaper wage which they make more profit. That's where it's at. The companies don't want to take a cut in profit to please the men...If you please your men, you're gonna have a better product and you're gonna have a better relationship with your employees and the company. Mostly, it's the people who runs the companies...the company should listen to it's employees but they don't. They got their own rules and they want to live by them rules and they don't ask employees what they think of the job.

The respondents recognize and fear the impact of international competition on the local economy. Many of the coal mines that they formerly worked in were owned by foreign corporations. They state:

Because the foreign people are coming. The Japanese are coming and taking everything over. It's fine if they would give people jobs, but they're shutting down the mining industry. The EPA shut them all down, just in the mining community.

The biggest problem, not with just Ohio, but the country, I hate to say it, is our, what do you call it, imports. In other words, they're shuttin' all our stuff down and bringin' everything from overseas. That's the problem. One of these days everybody's gonna be on welfare or the governments gonna be keepin' ya because there ain't gonna be any work.

With the continuing loss of jobs in southeastern Ohio, once a strong hold for unionism, criticism has emerged. A provider of services in a local community action agency (CAA) talks about unions and their role in the economic decline of the region. He states:

You know the glass factory went out of business because they wouldn't take a 10 percent reduction in wages. Other factories went out for the same reason. And the plant for the same reason. You can just go up and down the Ohio river valley and there are just plants that are closed and it's depressing. But I would say it is the union that closed them down in one form or another and it's a shame. There was a developer in Pittsburgh and he drew a circle from Pittsburgh to Marietta and he said there wouldn't be any major industries locate in that area other than what we already have and so far he's right. And that's 20 years ago and that's because of union problems. People go out, they just go out on strike and they do not attack that problem. Nobody talks about the (union) problem in this area.

There are dissenting opinions among the respondents, who are former members of the UMW, over the role that the unions have played in causing the demise of the mining

industry in southeastern Ohio. A former coal miner who now is a truck driver states:

In this area too, I honestly believe that the unions hurt themselves with their demands and the way the unions went. And I think they hurt themselves in that respect and now I believe there's people in this valley that would go to work and they wouldn't care if there was a union or not.

A lot of the respondents don't believe the unions are what they used to be. Another ex-miner who now runs a pizza shop comments:

Unions I don't feel are as good as what they used to be. I kind of feel that if it would have been non-union there they would have just kept the best people and I figure I would have been there. The unions they saved people's jobs that should have been fired for the things they do, missin' work and stuff like that. They fight for the wrong reasons and then they give a way things. They make deals with the company and stuff. There are quite a few guys that should have been fired and the union fought for them to save their job.

A caseworker states:

They've just become a political deal. I don't think they're working either. I really think that the Reagan administration hurt unions. They are not the unions that we knew them to be, you know, a working force.

But for other respondents the union remains a voice of hope. A former coal miner (who now is a full-time farmer) retains the activist spirit of unions past. He talks about the demise of unions in the United States:

Now the problem with the coal mines, Pittston Coal wants to break the union. I feel that the government wants to break all the unions. There biggest problem was when they let all them, what do they call them, those air traffic controllers, when they let Reagan pull that deal off. That was the biggest mistake. I can't believe they ever done it. I wasn't workin' and I felt myself that every union in the United States should have shut everything off. And said hey, you put em back to work or this country ain't gonna move. And from there it's been down hill for the union.

Despite the conflict over the continued utility of unions in the work place and their role in the destruction of the local economy many of the respondents still believe in unions and

would rather work in a union shop, though most of them now work for non-unionized companies in non-union factories and plants.

I think you get treated better in a union shop than in a non-union shop. You gotta get more money down there and the unions the only way we're gonna get it. A union would be better because of the conditions, better money against the non-union because they're gonna give you raises when they want. I think a union would be better.

If I had a union there wouldn't be no sexual harassment. There wouldn't be no clowning around with the guys. If I had a problem I could go to my union leader and they could help me out, but now you don't have a union. If they wanted to they could fire you on the spot probably, you know.

I figger no place should run without a union. The reason why I feel this is because without a union you can just walk in and hit the clock and they can fire you for just looking at you just cause they don't like you, know what I mean? If there's trouble with a foreman or something like that you always got back-up with the union.

The unions they said do not help blacks and especially black women. The union helped me and I'm a black woman. It's a lie because they helped me and they were there for me. Money wise, psychologically, in all ways they were there for me. They did not leave me alone (when she was fired from her job and later reinstated after being interviewed by the researcher).

Yes, I'm a firm believer in unions because I've worked in union shops. When something's wrong, there's more of you together to fight for what is right.

I'm a strong union man. I believe in unions. Without the unions, the non-union work around here wouldn't be as good as it is. They wouldn't make the kind of money they're makin'.

But you don't realize, people don't realize, if it wasn't for the union then everybody would still be workin' for 4 or 5 dollars an hour or less.

I think the unions hurt, but I don't think you can work without unions. If the unions are gone, everybody's going to be workin' for two dollars an hour and that's the way it's gonna be once the unions are gone. Once the unions are gone they're gonna have to start all over again, just like in the days of John L. Lewis. You just can't work without unions.

The respondents talked about the burden of paying excessive taxes on a low income:

What hurts the people mostly in my opinion is taxes. They don't make any money. They don't have any, but yet they're forced to pay taxes that they can't even keep up.

That's all it amounts to working to pay for hospitalization and they take that retirement out of it for county employees, plus federal and state. There's nothing left on pay day. It's just a matter of something to do and paying for hospitalization.

They were concerned about the lack of benefits provided by the companies they worked for. They report that companies would rather work full-time employees overtime than hire more workers because of the expense of health care and retirement benefits. A painter talks about the steel mill industry:

It's the benefits. It's all that way at the mill. That's why the mills won't hire. Everybody in the mills is doubling up because they don't want to pay benefits. So they'll pay you so long as they don't have to pay no benefits. That's what it's all about. It hurts.

Other retail and grocery stores have developed policies that prohibit hiring full-time employees in an effort to keep costs down. Unfortunately, these are the jobs that the respondents were most likely to be working in leaving them with little or no benefits of any kind. To make matters worse, one respondent was ineligible for any welfare assistance such as the medical card, even though his company did not provide him with any insurance, because he worked 40 hours per week (regardless of how much money he earned).

When local construction jobs open up residents of southeastern Ohio complain that these companies hire people from outside the area to work the jobs rather than hiring local people. The respondents recognize the need for economic diversification or as a secretary says, "We need something in this area besides coal."

The wife of an ex-coal miner talks about the financial decline of their family after losing a good paying mining job and the difficulty of attempting to continue to pay for bills they acquired based on a higher income.

And when you were making that kind of money that a miner made and you lose that job and you have to go to minimum wage you have bills based on what you were making from the mine. You don't have bills based on minimum wage income. So what do you do? You do what a lot of us do. You file bankruptcy. Because it's either bankruptcy so you can feed your



kids and pay the bills that you have to pay like your utilities and your rent and so on and so forth, or you just keep building yourself a bigger hole. There's not a lot of choice.

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Inflation is a considerable problem. Incomes and wages are going down at the same time that housing, health care, and other goods and services are rising. Housing costs are increasing at a rate faster than the respondents' incomes. The respondents talk about the constant inflation they experience in the department and grocery stores. They're concerned about the costs of milk, bread, and other necessities like utilities. A parts manager for a local garage contradicts the common perception that it is cheaper to live in the country.

Why is it that we are so poor in this area and you can walk into a grocery store and we will pay three times as much for toothpaste as you will in Columbus. I realize that the economics of it that these stores are smaller and they probably have to pay more for it, but here we are the people who really can't afford it and I'm gonna walk in there and pay three something for my toothpaste when I could drive 45 miles to another town and get it for half price, but then I've got my gas to consider. So that kind of bothers me. We pay higher prices for everything in this county, including gas which is higher.

Several of the respondents have outstanding medical bills that total anywhere from 300 to 25,000 dollars, because they cannot afford adequate medical insurance. One respondent was depressed, had a drinking problem and attended an inpatient treatment program for her alcoholism. Since completing treatment she has been hounded with letters requesting \$15,000 reimbursement for her treatment. Needless to say she does not have the money, no insurance to pay for the treatment and no hope of obtaining the money to pay for the treatment in the near future. She continues to be depressed, and the question arises as to whether the cure was worse than the problem, for in reality her problems have in many ways become exacerbated.

Inadequate health insurance is one of the biggest problems facing the respondents of this study. Many state that they either have no medical benefits or very limited ones. They are one accident away from total poverty and bankruptcy. They talk about turning

down jobs because they cannot afford to be without the medical card that they are eligible for in some cases while working part-time. The planner also states:

...the underground economy is outrageous here. And there are good reasons for it. That medical card is probably the biggest cause of that. If we would allow people to hold a job and keep their medical card a lot more people would go to work.

A farmer states, "There are jobs as grocery store sackers, but the problem is none of them has insurance. That's why they got so many of them."

### Exiting Poverty

This theme was originally conceptualized as the barriers to exiting poverty. However, the development of this theme was quite limited due to the dual nature of many causal factors that can be defined as the primary cause of the individual's poverty and/or as barriers that prevent poor people from exiting poverty. For example, when a person is employed in a service industry as a waitress they may define their poverty as being caused by a lack of education. This same factor may also be a barrier that prevents them from exiting poverty. For the purposes of this study, a barrier was defined as any factor that prevented a respondent from exiting poverty, but did not explain the cause of his or her poverty. Subsequently, many barriers were ruled out of this category because they had previously been identified as a primary cause of the respondent's poverty. This limited the full development of this theme. However, a more broadly defined theme of "exiting poverty" was developed for data analysis. Within this theme the researcher examined what the respondents had to say about their future, i.e. their chances of attaining middle class economic status or their opportunity to improve their situation within the next five years.

Most of the respondents did not believe that it was very likely that they would escape poverty. A factory worker talked with the researcher about the future.

**Researcher:** What are your chances of becoming middle class?

**Factory worker:** Well, not too good.

**Researcher:** What has happened to the American dream that we can all work hard and have that house and the two car garage?

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**Factory worker:** I think it's gone.

**Researcher:** Do you think it was ever there?

**Factory worker:** Yea, it was there because I did have it when we were married.

A welder answers the question: What kind of situation do you think you'll be in 5 years from now?

**Welder:** Same situation I'm in now, if not worse.

**Researcher:** So you don't see much hope for change?

**Welder:** No. I can sit here and talk a good story right now and make you believe everything that's coming down the line. It ain't happening, you know.

Other working poor people respond to the question: What are your chances of becoming middle class?

Slim to none (laughter). Because I think it's disappearing anyway and I think that I probably will be on the high end of the poverty level, but I don't think I'll ever get out of it unless my life drastically changes. And you know, I don't know if that will ever happen.

Anywhere from zero to none.

If the economy keeps goin' up its goin' to be a struggle of war ...I feel in the future.

Chances are zero. Unless, I have somebody. If I know a person that knows a person who is hiring so that they can put the word in for me. That's the only way that you're gonna get a job.

Well, unless I meet a real rich man and get married, probably none (laughter). Unless I would really luck out with my job skills and everything and get a really decent job I don't really see any changes.

But it's the guy, actually like me, with just a high school education, out here beaten this stupid equipment from daylight to dark and goin' down in the coal mine and tryin' to make it. I'm the guy who's never really gonna go nowhere, I don't think.

There were a few respondents who continue to maintain some sense of hope that things will get better.

I look on the bright side, it's gotta get a little better someday, somehow. Get a few bills paid that would be better. It can't get much worse let's look at it that way.

Well, my husband seems to think so (that things will get better). As a Christian I can say that hope is there. In this world, I don't know.

I'm hopin' a little better than I'm in right now. Where, you know, that I won't have to worry about one day to the next.

I truly believe that this valley is going to get back on its feet and I think something's going to break loose in here.

For the respondents in this study, many of the education and training programs are considered by them to be inadequate and incompatible with the needs of the employers in the community. A provider of services to the working poor at a local CAA confirms the respondents' belief that these training programs can become barriers to exiting poverty:

We have training programs. We train people who were coal miners to be van drivers, or kitchen aid helpers, or idiotic things that are not going to have a significant impact on their life.

He is also critical of the inadequate social services which fail to help people help themselves:

You know we're not really doing anything to pull themselves out of that situation. We keep their electric on and their gas on, but really don't do anything to pull them out of that situation. And that's frustrating. When you sit there and think about it.

The high costs of training and inaccessibility due to a lack of transportation were also found to be barriers to exiting poverty. The wife of a working poor truck driver talks about the high costs of attending truck driving training programs which were very difficult for her family to overcome when her husband was unemployed. Transportation costs in rural areas are particularly high as the respondents are forced to drive long distances for physical exams, evaluations and training.

All his trips down to the doctor in Burton which cost money. He had the welfare card that paid for it, but he didn't have the gasoline money and we had to keep borrowing money. I had to keep calling and asking people for

money. Then the training was in Hadleyville and he couldn't find anyone to ride with so we had to borrow more money, with the promise that when we got working we would pay this back. They said you have to have heavy overalls and gloves and he had to buy all that stuff. This guy went out and bought a brand new pair for my husband saying he needed them, but I don't think my husband even wore them because he was afraid something would happen to them. It cost money to go to training.

A cook was accepted into a training program with the JPTA, but they didn't provide transportation to and from the training program and as he states, "I had no way of getting there. So I had to drop out."

Another major barrier for working poor people is their inability to qualify for many of the existing social service or training programs because they earn slightly too much money. The teenage daughter of a working poor mother who makes slightly over \$5 dollars an hour states:

Everytime at school they gave me this thing to go down to the unemployment office, the JPTA or something like that and they told me down there that my mother makes too much.

For other respondents, the ever present patronage system which requires a person to have "connections" or to "know someone" to get a job are major barriers to finding an adequate job in southeastern Ohio.

You have to know somebody to get a job in the plants. We know quite a few people but I'm not related to em. Normally the people down here at this plant they only hire sons and daughters.

Finally, there is the practicality of middle age men and women going back to school to upgrade their education and work skills. One of the respondents was advised by a counselor not to try to go to school because he was married with two children and needed a job to support his family. For other respondents it is not a counselor telling them to forego school, but they themselves. A 37 year old, litter control specialist who is a former coal miner states:

My problem is how do I feed 4 kids and go to school at the same time?  
Then I think how could I get back into the study groove?

The respondents believe that changes need to be made in four primary areas if the problems of working poor people are to be rectified. They are: 1) the government; 2) the economy; 3) the welfare system and 4) the health care system.

The Government

The respondents do not believe that the legislators and local politicians are cognizant of their situation.

The legislators need to open their eyes and look at what's goin' on. They need to waken up.

If you take the politicians and congressmen and all that and put them in the position where the poor people are, put them in the position. Leave their bank accounts where it is, leave their credit cards and leave their check books where they are. Put them in the environment and put them in a situation where the poor people are then a lot of them would see just how bad those people are livin' and how they feel. Put them in the same position that they're in.

I think they should walk a mile in our moccasins to see what it is like to live like that.

A laid off coal miner working several part-time, low income jobs expresses his dissatisfaction with the lack of assistance provided by the government:

We're the people that keeps the big one's going. Like I say, I been paying my taxes all my life since I graduated and I can't get a little relief. If it's nothing more, give me some job leads...I want to continue paying my taxes, just help me get that spot, that start someplace.

Economic revitalization of the region is a vital concern for the working poor people of southeastern Ohio. They propose that the government build government operated facilities in the area and that political leaders develop an economic development package for selling the community to corporations in an attempt to diversify the economy.

Why can't the government help put something up? Something the country needs. A government operated facility or plant in a depressed area and hire people.

My proposal to the present politicians was to make up a program that we could actually go out and show the land that we have available and to make

sure that we have the tax rebates and all the things we can give them, the water and the sewer. You know, make sure you have every thing in line. Make sure that when an industry looks at you that you're going to make it easy as possible for them to come into an area and give them some (tax) breaks for ten years. You need brochures, you need videotapes, you need all kinds of things and you need to hit the convention circuit and find people who are looking for a place to locate their company. We do have a nice rural setting and there are things that could be done if an industry moved in. You know, you could sell that aspect of it.

The government puts out a lot of money for a lot of things. If they could just use some of the money to maybe build up an area like this that don't hardly have nothin' and put in some place to work for people. I mean it doesn't have to be a gigantic plant or somethin', but somethin' that pays...At least minimum wage, even more.

### The Economy

Economically, the respondents recommend development of new industries for the region, re-opening dormant coal mines, and continued research and development to improve the anti-pollution technology that could enable the power plants to burn the high sulfur coal of southeastern Ohio.

First, I'd just have to try and get some industry in here, that's all there is to it. That's the only change you could try to make.

Get some jobs available that the people won't have to ask for help. I think a lot of people feel the same way. If they had a job, they wouldn't have to ask and beg for help. They could get it on their own and they could survive.

I'd tell them to work on gettin' the mines re-opened. Workin' on ways to put scrubbers at the power plants so they can burn this coal without any trouble. If not, work on bringing other industries into this area.

I think there's technology they could develop to use more of the high sulfur coal, you know.

I don't know what you could tell em (legislators). Coal is the only thing that is gonna save this country. It's their cheapest and most natural resource they got.

One respondent whose husband has to work out of the area to support the family would like to see Ohio promote gambling as a way of revitalizing the local economy and opening up job opportunities so her husband can return to work in the valley.

Now they're trying to instigate gambling in Ohio. Little Chicago all over again. It used to be known as Little Chicago. If gambling would come into Ohio I feel that the economics of Ohio would pick up all over. Closer to the casinos it would pick up even more.

Some of the respondents recognize the need for a diversified economy that is not dependent on coal. A former coal miner's wife states:

We need something in this area besides coal. This valley has depended on coal for beaucoup years, but they need something else.

Another respondent sees the need for new industries to ward off the need for outmigration which causes people to lose their identity, roots, and homes.

To see to it that there are industries that can be brought into these depressed areas and I don't see any reason why there couldn't be to supply these people with jobs so they don't have to leave their homes. It was on the Oprah Winfrey (Show) the time she was in Bellaire. There's a lot of people that are poverty level because they don't want to leave their homes. Their roots are here. And I think people ought to be able to stay and live where they want to live and still make a living at it.

A caseworker who earns poverty level wages states that the government needs to re-prioritize what it spends its resources on to assist working poor people and others to survive in these difficult economic times.

Obviously, I think if the budget were revised and less money spent on defense and the military and that money could be allocated to give people jobs. People don't want benefits. They want jobs. And I think that if we would quit sending 3 million dollars a day to El Salvador to flame a fire that needs to be put out anyways, it could be used in this country to create jobs and get people off the rolls. But that's not profitable to the powers that be.

Finally, there is a common complaint among the respondents that the minimum wage is inadequate (these interviews were conducted before the raises in the minimum wage, but in all likelihood these modest increases would still be viewed as inadequate by the respondents). They also feel strongly that when new jobs are created in the community



they must be the kinds of jobs that provide people with a decent wage with which he or she can support his or her family.

Minimum wage stinks. Because minimum wage and stuff like that is not up to standards of what food prices are. I couldn't do it on my own self off of a minimum wage. I couldn't pay the utilities, pay the rent, and just buying food on my own self, no way one person could eat. No way.

I'd like to see the minimum wage raised. I really would.

I would do everything I could to create higher paying jobs, more higher paying jobs. I mean I think that the people that live as a cook what I do, I come home totally tired. I work just as hard, if not harder than them guys workin' down at the plant pushin' the buttons and I don't even get half of what they make.

### The Welfare System

Many of the respondents expressed anger and frustration over the administration of their local welfare programs. They were particularly concerned that these welfare administrators did not understand the unique needs of working poor people.

Another reason that the welfare system is out of balance is because the people who make the system have never lived the system. They don't know what we need. They don't know what it is like. They need to come down here and listen to us and see what went wrong so that we can change it. I mean, you take a rich man that has never had to go out and mow a yard to earn supper money...

There is resentment that so much time, energy and resources are spent on the "total welfare people" who don't try to help themselves. While the plight of working poor people is neglected. The respondents would like to see the eligibility guidelines for welfare programs broadened to include low-income, working people as a reward for their hard work and diligence. At the same time, they believe that welfare regulations should be more strictly enforced and benefits limited for those who do not work to help themselves.

I'd worry a lot more about the working class, instead of the people who don't want to help themselves. Not hand them so much so they'll have to get out and try a little harder like the next man, who lost his job and has to raise his family. Because I think people like me in my shape, as far as the

legislature, are totally neglected. That's just the way I feel about it and there are no ifs and whats about it. We are neglected. 103

Make it harder for the one's that do absolutely nothing, ya know, unless they are disabled or something like that, and make it easier and give more to the one's that's willing to take the \$3.65 an hour job.

I think that there's a lot of people around here that should be working that's not. That won't and I think the welfare system maybe is too lenient and they keep giving them money.

I'd maybe raise the limit for people like me who don't make enough to make it so you can get some kind of help somewhere, you know.

The respondents have many recommendations for changing the welfare system and its regulations so that they support and reward their attempts to work and provide for themselves rather than hindering their efforts. They see a need for supplemental medical benefits for at least a year and preferably for as long as they are needed when they work in jobs that provide no affordable health insurance.

Give him the medical benefits. Give him the extra food stamps we need. Make that system for the person that is just now down and out. Give them a year to get back on their feet.

I think they should let you keep the medical card if you make so much, you know what I mean. Because after one year it doesn't mean that things get any better, ya know.

A government clerk comments about the bureaucratic red tape and paper work:

Every six months we have to renew our welfare, food stamp application, ok. When you renew you're talking a 32 page book, that you have to fill out and you have to put everything down. Things that they got when we first applied. Look at the waste in this when nothin' has changed, ya know?

Other respondents are concerned about the need for transitional support when they are without jobs to prevent them from becoming totally dependent on the welfare system for support. They request that they not be required to lose everything to qualify for benefits so they do not have to live a continual cycle of starting all over again each time they lose a job.

You've got a system for the lifers from the day they are born they are welfare recipients. I said, you know, you need a plan to help the working class person like

myself who lost my job. I said help me out for six months or a year, ya know, 104 until I can get back on my feet.

Why did I have to struggle for a year and then lose my car? We were laid off (a year), before we collected a dime on welfare, before we took food stamps or anything. We had to get rid of the car first. Now they couldn't have given me a year to find work or do something with that car?

A waitress and caseworker requests that they be allowed to keep more of the money they earn so they can save some money to build a better life for themselves rather than having their earnings absorbed by the welfare system which keeps them in a perpetual state of poverty despite their efforts at work:

I think if you're working they shouldn't take so much off of you. They should give you a little bonus to let you save for so many months and take you off of it. That way you can at least be comfortable and not have to worry about how am I going to pay the rent this month.

The one thing I would do is being introduced or being considered, is this bill to raise the amount of money people can actually earn before they are taken off of the assistance rolls. I mean people have difficulty working because how do they earn money without hurting their benefits. I think it's ludicrous that in our society that people make 10 dollars here and they take 8 dollars from them over here. That's what's crazy.

Other respondents talk about the expense of cleaning supplies and the need for them to be allowed to purchase these items with food stamps. They also talk about the embarrassment of using food stamps and would like to see another method devised which does not promote such public humiliation at a check-out counter.

I think they should change it somehow so that you can buy cleaning things like laundry detergent and soap. You have to have that stuff too.

I will admit there are times, if I'm by certain people in the grocery store and I'm checking out that I feel uncomfortable using food stamps. That's one thing that I have a hard time dealing with too! I think there should be another way to do that.

A litter control supervisor comments on the need for a school allowance that would help to at least partially offset the enormous expense of children's clothing at the beginning of each school year.

It's maddening because the government does not allow for our kids any clothing for school or anything like that. I can give my kids away and they'll pay foster parents to buy em complete wardrobes but yet people on low incomes they won't even give you \$100 school allowance, you know, to go out and buy your kids anything that they need.

And last but not least, a truck driver talks about the need to revise the way low-income lunch programs for students are administered to avoid the stigma his high school age daughter has experienced:

I wish the system could be changed in school where everybody doesn't have to know this kids getting a free lunch or this kids getting a reduced price on lunches.

### Health Care

Health care insurance reform is on the minds of many of the working poor people of southeastern Ohio. A retail clerk defines the number one need of working poor people as free health insurance coverage.

I think they're working on it and they need to hurry up and that's free medical for the workin' poor and that's the most outstanding.

Their recommendations for changing the health care system in the United States are varied. A secretary and litter control supervisor call upon the welfare system to provide health insurance protection for the working poor people who work more than 20 hours per week.

If you work over 20 hours per week you're considered to be working and they will give you no benefits outside of food stamps. And we always thought the system was backwards. It would give people an incentive to take the low paying jobs, if they gave them some health benefits.

I think the one thing that the government doesn't do that they should is medical. If you go out and get a full time job they do have it now where for

one year they'll provide you with medical assistance. But, I mean, if you're only working for 5 bucks an hour, a year from now it's not gonna be any different and it just makes more sense to me that if the government paid for their medical, they'd still be further ahead than paying for them totally. They'd still be earning money on their own and keeping the government from spending so much. 106

A pizza store manager suggests that the government require employers to provide their employees with adequate medical insurance.

I think as far as the government they should enforce that jobs provide insurance, that they provide decent wages.

Still other respondents believe there is a need for a national health care program in the United States.

Oh, health insurance. That's one main thing. I would like to see national health insurance like Canada. I think England has it too. A few months ago I stopped and talked with someone I worked in the mine with in Wheeling and he's wanting to pass national health insurance. He's a die hard Republican. I said well, you're going to have to start voting Democratic cause the Republicans are against it.

See if there was national health care insurance people could get by on the lower paying jobs, I think. Cause that's the main thing that worries me if something happens to one of my kids, an injury or something. Cause I could get a whole lot less if I just didn't have to worry about one of my kids. Just the health care that's my major worry right there.

Besides these four major areas of change, the respondents recommend that the government work to reduce inflation and taxes. A secretary talks about the need to restructure the tax system so that the rich pay their proportional share of the tax load and the poor pay less based on their ability to pay.

There needs to be a restructuralization of the tax system because they're not taxing the people who have it enough. There's still loop holes for the rich people to get through and the poor people, there's nothin' they can do but write down how much they made that year. They don't have any loop hole they can jump through and they need to even it out somehow. They're takin' money out of the poor man's pocket who really needs it.

A laid-off coal miner complains about the local patronage system and the need to protect the rights of people to be hired based on their qualifications, not who they know.

I think they ought to hire people on their qualifications not on who they know. I see a lot of that. In the local government they hire themselves and if they would go on the qualifications instead of who you know, I think it would be better. I just can't see people getting hired because they're family of somebody that knows somebody else. It isn't right at all.

Finally, some respondents recommend the development of more relevant training and education programs that can make them more marketable to obtain employment.

Affordable, quality day care, particularly for single parent mothers is needed. More rental assistance. And finally, a caseworker making poverty level wages suggests the establishment of a credit union for poor people.

There's a program that I would like to see established is a credit union for poor people. I did some studying about it for the local Haitian community and one of the programs they had down there was a credit union. And I don't know the first thing about finances. But I thought what a concept. Because people don't have that option. With them, they don't have a choice. If you go to these rent to own places you pay three times the price and make one payment late and it's gone.

### Typology of Working Poor People

The following are distinctive and mutually exclusive types of working poor people that the researcher had the opportunity to interview. Within the context of this study these were the three categories that emerged from the data. All of the research participants interviewed fit within one of these three categories. Each "type" of working poor person has a unique set of factors which led to their being poor and each one out of necessity will require different solutions to ameliorate their condition. The importance of this classification system is its utility in providing policy makers and service providers with an understanding of the uniqueness of working poor people and help them avoid the inclination to stereotype all working poor people as a single entity. This is not to say that this listing is all inclusive. There may be other types of working poor people that the researcher did not interview or there may be other ways to analyze and construct this

typology. Nevertheless, these three categories of people have problems that are common to their group and will require solutions that address their own special needs.

### The Abandoned

The abandoned were the largest group of respondents in the study. These are the respondents that had good paying jobs in the coal mines, steel mills and plants that paid anywhere from 25 to 50,000 dollars a year and whose jobs were lost. They owned homes and had two late model automobiles. At one time, they were considered "middle class" and comparatively prosperous. Now they most likely rent a home rather than own it. And if they do own their home they are in the process of trying to sell it before it is lost due to their inability to maintain a mortgage on their present poverty level wages. These people are primarily poor because of structural unemployment. Subsequently, their work skills became obsolete. In many cases, they held highly skilled positions, but these skills had limited transferability when they were no longer capable of finding employment in their field of expertise. They have long work histories that reflect excellent work habits. These people were part of the middle class who have slipped into the lower echelons of the economic ladder ever so swiftly. They have been abandoned by the coal and steel companies that have shown little corporate responsibility for the people and the communities they left behind. They have been abandoned by a government that has taken a hands off approach to the problem of structural unemployment in hopes that the labor market would eventually absorb these people back into work force. Unfortunately, for many of these people, the jobs they have been able to obtain pay marginal wages and provide them with few benefits. Their future in these positions does not look promising.

### The Neglected

The neglected were the second largest group of respondents. These respondents have never been able to obtain middle class income status. In most cases they have always

been poor, though some have escaped from total welfare dependency. These people tend to lack the education, work skills or experience that are necessary to obtain the kinds of jobs that will enable them to earn enough money to escape poverty. Others may have personal problems such as alcoholism, mental illness or post traumatic stress disorder that limit their ability to succeed in the work world in other than low wage, part-time, service type employment. They are an invisible cross section of working poor people who have been neglected and ignored.

### The Deserted

The deserted were a smaller subsample of respondents, but an important cluster of women with special problems. These are single parent, divorced women with children who once were married to men who made a decent wage and provided for them. After the divorce many had to go on welfare and fought their way into the work world. In most cases, their ex-spouses have refused to pay child support and left the social and financial responsibility for raising the children entirely up to the mother. Many of these women have only a high school education and did not work in the community prior to the divorce because they were committed to working in the home and providing their children with the nurturing they needed. Unfortunately, after the divorce they were ill-equipped for the job market. Some didn't even have a driver's license. Others had only minimal work experience, education and work skills which deprived them of quality job opportunities. In addition, many of them faced sexual discrimination in the work place which further limited their opportunities to find quality jobs that pay a decent wage. They have been deserted in every sense of the word.



Living in poverty creates a variety of biopsychosocial problems for the respondents. For some there is depression, anxiety, hurt and fatigue. There is the anger and frustration that results in marital conflict. There are the children who are embarrassed and ashamed of what they wear, where they live and who they are. They cope with these problems by focusing on today because they have little control over tomorrow. Some turn to alcohol and prescribed medications to cope with these feelings. Others become isolated and alienated which may lead to suicide. Bowling, walking and working are other ways in which respondents get away from it all. Faith in God is a final and definitive source of strength for many.

The primary support system for the respondents consisted of the immediate environment of family, friends and church. Governmental support was the most negatively viewed and least used. Some isolated altruistic acts by local business people and medical practitioners were noted in support of the respondents and their families.

Survival strategies utilized by the respondents to live on a limited income were the following: working multiple jobs, spouse and children working part-time jobs to supplement the family's income, and some leaving the area temporarily to earn money and return home. Some respondents live with family for short periods of time to save money and most spend enormous amounts of energy making do with what they have, making things last and doing without.

One of the major contributing factors to the poverty condition of the respondents appeared to be the lack of opportunity. There were a few respondents who did not appear motivated or capable of working for long periods of time under supervision. Nevertheless, poverty for working poor people appeared to be strongly related to the fact that there were not enough jobs, that paid enough money, that offered the employee enough hours and benefits to earn an adequate living to support his or her family. While many of the respondents appeared to exhibit the characteristics of the culture of poverty to cope

with the constant stress of being poor, these characteristics did not appear to contribute to their condition of poverty. These people were working. They were doing the best they could with the resources they had available to them. Additionally, there were those people who continued to hope and see a future for themselves. They did not reflect any of the characteristics of the culture of poverty.

Other important micro causes of poverty for the respondents were: lack of education, work skills, and experience, personal problems, large families, poor budgeting, lack of transportation, loss of family support, divorce and inadequate child support. The macro causes of poverty were: discrimination, low-wage economy and the local elites unwillingness to promote economic development and desire to avoid any competition. Also, strict environmental laws and regulations, international competition, excessive payroll deductions and taxes, inflation, hiring of outsiders to do contract work in the community, dependence on a non-diversified economy, the demise of the unions, and corporate greed were other contributing factors.

Most of the respondents did not believe that their futures held much promise. Barriers to exiting poverty consisted of inadequate and irrelevant training and education programs that did not match the needs of the local employers. Training programs were too expensive and inaccessible to the respondents because of a lack of transportation. Many of the respondents were ineligible for special education and training programs because they earned too much money. The patronage system prevented some of the respondents from obtaining jobs that did become available. The stigma, fear and economic hardship of going back to school in one's adult years for training or education prevented others from exiting poverty.

Recommendations for change focused on the government, economy, welfare and health care systems. Respondents recommend that the government develop an awareness of their problems and work to revitalize the economic structure of the community by doing the following: 1) building government operated facilities in the community; and 2)

developing a economic development package of videos, presentations and tax incentives for industries to relocate in the region.

Economically, the respondents recommend the establishment of new industries in the region, re-opening old coal mines, and conducting research and development projects that can improve the anti-pollution technology to increase the viability of burning Ohio coal. Other respondents see a need for the government to redirect funds away from defense spending toward the needs of rural, working poor people and the communities where they live. They also recommend increased wages.

For the respondents, the welfare system needs to refocus its efforts to help working people help themselves with transitional support between jobs and health insurance benefits by increasing the income levels allowed to qualify for welfare assistance. Also, the respondents would like to see the eligibility criteria changed to allow people to own cars that they have loans on so they can continue to look for and/or work while they are receiving benefits. They would like to see people be able to purchase cleaning supplies with food stamps and work to develop a means by which welfare benefits, food stamps, and free school lunches could be administered by reducing the amount of stigma and labeling.

Health insurance needs to be available for every working poor person either through employer provided programs, government provided supplemental insurance for low-income people, or by the implementation of a national health care insurance program in the United States.

The respondents believe government needs to work to reduce inflation and restructure the amount of taxes required of working poor people. Also, relevant training and education programs, accessible and affordable, quality day care, rental assistance, and a credit union for the poor to help them obtain emergency funds to purchase or repair automobiles or other necessities are needed.

Finally, these interviews revealed three types of working poor people. Each with their own unique set of problems and needs. There are the abandoned who lost their jobs due to the economic collapse of the industrial sector of the community and found themselves unexpectedly poor. There are the neglected who have never had much, but continue to struggle to survive by working rather than accepting total charity for their livelihoods. And finally, there are the deserted. These are the women who believed in the traditional nuclear family unit and then discovered, the hard way, the problems of being a single parent mother with no child support.

## CHAPTER V

### THE CONTEXT AND CULTURE OF RURAL WORKING POOR PEOPLE

#### Introduction

In this chapter, document analysis captures the context of the setting in which the respondents have to live and work. The two major themes of hopelessness and hope are explored. Finally, the cultural aspects of rural working poor people are examined.

#### Document Analysis

Almost 50 years ago, Shannon (1943) conducted a study of poverty in southeastern Ohio and published a monograph entitled, Southeastern Ohio in depression and war. His description of poverty in the Appalachian region of Ohio in 1943 is still quite descriptive of the situation today. He states:

The dominant fact about Southeastern Ohio is the economic impoverishment of the area and of its people. Widespread unemployment, malnutrition, wretched housing, inadequate health and medical services, poor schooling, irregular and low incomes, the shock of one economic disaster after another, a losing struggle against economic adversity--this and other conditions associated with poverty are manifestations of this fact. (p. 12)

Over 100 documents were collected by the researcher over a 2 year period of time to help clarify the kinds of social, political and economic problems of southeastern Ohio that exist today. Newspaper and popular magazine articles, letters to the editor and a series of letters written to several legislators by one of the respondents in the study comprise the sources of the collection. These documents help describe the context of the larger community in which the respondents live and work.

Document analysis reveals the two major themes of hopelessness and hope. While the theme of hopelessness is the stronger theme of the two, there appears to be a mild ray of hope that has emerged in recent newspaper articles and letters to the editor.

Hopelessness is indicated by the constant bombardment of articles that consistently appear on the front pages of local, county and state wide newspapers on the socioeconomic problems of southeastern Ohio. During the past 6 years there have been a series of articles that describe the psychosocial and economic impact of coal mines, steel mills, glass and pottery factories closing in the region (Gorisek, 1984; Jacobs, 1990; Lane, 1990; Robb, 1990; Yocum, 1990). Two-hundred ninety workers were laid off from a strip mining company in Belmont County ("R & F to Lay Off," 1989), another 300 workers lost their jobs at a deep mine in Perry County (Robb, 1990), and there are more threats that deep mines in Meigs County will close and lay off an additional 1,258 miners ("AEP's plan," 1991) due to the Clean Air Act of 1990, which has imposed strict anti-pollution requirements on the power plants that burn the high-sulfur coal of southeastern Ohio. The highest unemployment and poverty rates continue to prevail in the counties of southeastern Ohio (Ohio Labor Market Information, 1989; "Ohio's poverty," 1990). What remains for the residents of southeastern Ohio are the service industry jobs that pay low wages to their employees. A local resident of southeastern Ohio describes the situation by saying, "It's all hamburger wages here (Lane, 1990, p.1A)."

Many articles and letters to the editor have addressed the serious controversy of environmental protection versus employment opportunities. Robert Murray, President of the Ohio Valley Coal Company, in his comments to a select committee on clean coal technology, confronts the reality of continued enforcement of strict environmental regulations on the working people of southeastern Ohio ("Acid rain," 1990). He states:

From my 34 years of experience, I know that all the average coal miner wants in life is to earn a living for his family in safety and security and to be treated with respect and dignity. Those in the present administration's Department of Labor and Environmental Protection Agency, who say that we will just have to retrain these miners, do not know

what they are talking about. Many, if not most, of these miners cannot be retrained. Also, for cultural, social and economic reasons, they cannot or will not relocate to obtain a job. Thus, when their jobs are taken away, these are good people, who want to work, remain on the negative side of Ohio's economic ledger... 116

Unquestionably, 'acid rain' has never killed a human being. However, the 'acid rain' legislation of President Bush and Senator Mitchell will kill many Ohioans (pp. 1, 7).

Over 9,000 coal mining jobs have been lost in Ohio over the past 10 years due to environmental restrictions and the inability to compete with non-union coal mines in the west (Lowe and Woods, 1990). In a letter to the editor (Blackwood, 1991, p. 4), a resident of southeastern Ohio states that it is the miners and their families who will ultimately pay for the price of clean air and the closing of the Meigs County coal mines.

She states:

...one-fourth of Ohio will shrivel up and die economically...

No more eating out at the restaurants in Athens, Jackson, Vinton, Meigs and surrounding counties. No more shopping in the department stores, no new construction projects, no charitable giving, no traveling or vacationing, no new furniture or appliances, no real estate purchases, no new cars, etc.

Tax revenues for local governments will plummet, and the burden on decreased revenues will increase as unemployment runs out and welfare becomes a last resort.

The bleak, desolate ghost towns of the old West could become chilling reality as businesses collapse and families are forced to relocate in search of jobs.

An attempt has been made to open a new deep mine in Athens County that has resulted in a growing debate and controversy over the environmental impact of long wall mining on the underground water supplies and land. The environmental activists who seek to protect the environment wish to block the opening of the mine. The residents of the community who are in dire need of jobs that pay a decent wage are fighting for its opening (Smith, 1990; Walters, 1990; Woods, 1990).

And while there is controversy over the environmental pollution and damage caused by the burning of high-sulfur coal and the use of long wall mining technology, there are those who worry more about the poverty pollution that has a more immediate impact on the

residents of southeastern Ohio. Pam Sloan (1986), the editor of the Monroe County

Beacon in Monroe County, Ohio states:

I call it the pollution of poverty. It starts with a broken spirit. Laid off, called back, laid off, unemployment runs out, welfare, hope and pray...

Move? Well, with unemployment running 12 to 25 percent in the area, the chances of a job are slim. Where do you get money for rents and deposits? How do you sell a house where there are hundreds of houses for sale and no jobs?

So the house doesn't get painted and the roof gets patched instead of replaced and the porch floor is too bad to be patched, there's no money to rebuild it. It takes very little time for a piece of property to lose its value...

And you watch the spirit gradually break and you watch the poverty pollution take its toll on your beautiful scenery, on your roads, on your schools, but most of all...on your people. (p. 6)

The problems of the region seem endless. Two women in Pike County are charged with vote fraud for purchasing ballots (Yost and Dreitzler, 1990). People are losing their jobs and then using credit to live on while they search for employment (Sadler, 1990). Marijuana has become one of the major cash crops in southeastern Ohio (Belew, 1990; Dreitzler, 1990; Massie, 1990; Yocum, 1990). A single marijuana plant has a street value of \$1,000 of which "Dave Samples, Jackson County extension agent, said it would take 5 acres of corn, after expenses, to equal the profit of a single marijuana plant" (Yocum, 1989, p. 1A). Thousands of unemployed workers and their families are being forced to migrate out of the region in search of jobs, others stay and work low paying jobs, and still others go on welfare ("Columbus area," 1991; Yocum, 1986). The preliminary findings from the 1990 Census show that Belmont County lost 14% and Jefferson County 12 % of their total population since 1980 ("Columbus area," 1991). Many of the poor rural school districts are under funded and are unable to provide an adequate education for their students ("Study claims," 1990). Food stamp use has risen dramatically due to the mine layoffs and continued lack of economic development that could bring new job opportunities into the region. In some southeastern Ohio counties food stamp use has increased by over 80% during the past 8 years (Ring, 1989). The poor are worse off today due to an inflationary



economy in which welfare benefits have not been able to keep pace with the cost of living (Lancaster, 1990). Finally, the powerlessness and hopelessness of the community are reflected in the words of a county commissioner from Vinton County when he was asked about the persistent poverty in the county (Massie and Brooks, 1990). He states:

In a sense it bothers me quite a bit, Fee said. But what are you going to do about it.

The lack of an industrial base is a big problem here. We've tried about everything we can. We've hired a specialist on economic development, but we lack structures and availability as far as buildings.

What we don't lack is people who want to work, he said.

There's people here that would give anything for a job, if a job was available, Fee said.

Every year, we've got bright young people graduating from high school, and they've got to go out of the county to find a job. It's been this way so long, I don't know how you get out of it. (p. 3C)

There are the cries for help. Letters to the editor and legislators express the frustration and anger of people who want to work and provide for their families but are unable to due to the depressed economy. In a letter to the editor, Burchby (1991) states:

We hope to live to see the day when our president declares a war on poverty and we all put up our American flags.

When we decide to make decent public education, adequately funded, for all kids a moral crusade and we wear buttons that say "We Support Our Teachers."

When we commit ourselves to providing shelter for every American and we wear T-shirts and sweatshirts supporting "Operation Decent Shelter."

When we decide that every American has a right to health care and then hold rallies and parades to honor public health nurses, doctors and paramedics...

We know that it may be asking a lot for people to get as excited about caring for our neighbors as we sometimes get over killing our so-called enemies. But we also know that the hard work or freedom is the building of humane, caring and healthy communities. (p.4)

Dr. Kristi Leatherwood (1990), an Ohio University professor attempting to organize a grass roots coalition for poor people states:

Unfortunately, for many people, the rights of the poor don't seem to include the opportunity to work for a decent wage. Many of these people (environmentalists) will rise up to drive out any industry that might locate here and provide some of the local poor people with well-paying jobs.

I have a strong sense that many of the poor people of Athens County want neither welfare, pity, the 'guidance' of the educated elite, nor

The following is an excerpt from a letter written to state and federal legislators by the wife of a laid-off coal miner. At the time of the interview, her husband was working as a litter control specialist for the county earning approximately \$9,000 a year to support a family of six. She wrote:

I am writing concerning our welfare system and how I feel it is unfair. My husband was just laid off. He worked in the coal mines for eleven and a half years. We have four children to feed and clothe. We do not believe in living off the system, but we are also not too proud to ask for help.

(When applying for food stamps) We were first told that they could not process our application until my 3 year old had a social security card. We then went and did all the necessary things so that we could reapply. Believe me they ask to see everything. A lot of it is nothing but nonsense, but if it will benefit my family; I will go to any length of trouble.

After all that, we went back and reapplied only to be told that our car is worth too much. This is unfair! We can't eat that car. I realize that people on welfare can't go around driving Cadillacs, but I believe there should be two sets of rules. One for those who live off of the system and one for those who are down on their luck. After all, it is not my fault nor my husbands that he is out of work.

My husband has worked all his life and paid taxes into this system so that if we ever needed it; it would be there for us. Now we find out, we can't get any kind of help, not even after our unemployment runs out, unless we sell our car, or the bank takes it back.

I just think that the government ought to give people six months to a year to get back on their feet. We don't want to live on welfare, just use it to help us out and give my husband a chance to find work.

Then to ice the cake I got called to serve on jury duty the same week we were turned down for food stamps. I was called to serve a country that was unwilling to serve me. I did it willingly because with all its faults it is still the greatest country on Earth. I have never written a letter like this before, but I decided that you are always asking for opinions and it was time that you heard mine. Thanks for the time it took to read this. I hope and pray it does someone some good.

Mrs. Sharon Wilson

While the theme of hope is not near as prevalent as hopelessness, there are nevertheless signs that people in the community are beginning to take a hard look at themselves and are beginning to search for ways to turn the downward spiral of the

economy around in southeastern Ohio. A community developer in Barnesville, Ohio states

("Time to," 1989):

We have spent much time grieving over the loss of prosperity. Now we believe it is time to put that behind us. Continuing to 'pine' over lost riches will not bring them back. A recovery, if one is to occur, must be built upon the resources that our forefathers have left us, and by the sheer talents and abilities of the pioneer spirit that the Eastern Ohio hills have instilled in each of us. (p. 1A)

An editorial that appeared in The Times Leader calls for leadership to emerge from within the community to explore solutions to the problems of the area ("We need," 1990). It states:

We can bellyache forever about money woes and it doesn't change a thing. What we all need, and what the public can demand, are some concrete solutions to change the tide in Ohio. We need the leadership in this state, in our counties and in our communities to find news [sic] means of revenues, jobs and paychecks. Without that leadership, the we-need-money woes continue, our tax bases will shrink even more and our census in 2000 will make 1990 look like part of the good old days...And until we demand change or find the means to secure the change ourselves, we can't complain about any we-need-money blues. (p. 4A)

After it was announced that the Peabody Coal Company was closing its mine in Perry County, laying off 300 more workers in a county that historically has one of the highest unemployment rates in Ohio, the researcher went to visit the political headquarters in the county seat where an unsuccessful drive was being led to keep the mine open. A yellow piece of cardboard on the wall had an inscription written in red that said:

**In the face of uncertainty there is nothing wrong with hope.**

This inscription reflects the fears of just one of the communities in southeastern Ohio that have been dealt many harsh blows, face an uncertain future, feel powerless to change their situation, and sometimes have little else left, but hope. The frontier spirit and pride of times past has been seriously challenged by these changing economic conditions which have created an era where hard work alone cannot guarantee economic success.

Efforts to improve the economic status of southeastern Ohio may be modest, but they are a beginning. Politicians, government officials, business and union leaders are searching for ways to keep the Meigs County mines operational with tax incentives and assistance in the building of scrubbers to clean the high sulfur coal so it may be burned safely by the power plants (Woods, 1991). Harrison County is working to establish a Clark Gable theater and museum to attract tourists (Massie, 1989). Monroe County has put together two videos to market the attributes of the county for attracting new businesses ("Monroe County," 1990). Local government officials are calling for a reduction in the bureaucratic red tape required to apply for grants from the Department of Development that prevent small rural communities from applying for assistance (Heck, 1990). The United Mine Workers are looking into ways to re-open existing mines (Bhaerman, 1990) and some local lumber company executives have made visits to the far east to market their hard woods (Lowe, 1989).

There are cries for welfare reform that provide incentives for low-income people who work with tax reductions, earned income and child care tax credits ("Welfare confusion," 1990). Welfare reform has been proposed that allows welfare recipients to keep a greater percentage of the money they earn through work (Heck, 1990). Finally, there are the many food pantries, shelters and soup kitchens provided by the community action agencies and church groups that seek to provide low-income people with a safety net to preserve their ability to survive during these hard times (Massie, 1990; Price, 1990).

The following is a discussion of the culture of rural working poor people. To Erikson (1976) culture means "the way a people live" (p. 79). More specifically:

it is used throughout the social sciences to refer to those modes of thinking and knowing and doing that a people learn to regard as natural, those beliefs and attitudes that help shape a people's way of looking at themselves and the rest of the universe, those ideas and symbols that a people employ to make sense of their own everyday experience as members of a society. (p. 79)

For Giddens (1991) culture consists of:

...the values the members of a given group hold, the norms they follow, and the material goods they create....Culture refers to the whole way of life of the members of a society. It includes how they dress, their marriage customs and family life, their patterns of work, religious ceremonies, and leisure pursuits (pp. 33-34).

For the purposes of this study, culture will be defined broadly to enhance the researcher's ability to describe the world view of rural working poor people and how they perceive the following aspects of their life: family, community, religion, work, poverty, welfare, the government, politicians, voting, health care, transportation, recreation, needs and goals.

### Family

When the respondents were asked what they valued the most in their lives, they overwhelmingly responded that it was family that meant the most to them. The attitude of placing family first was reflected in the living rooms and hallways of the respondents that were filled with pictures of sons, daughters and grandchildren. In one home the researcher visited, there were over 50 pictures of the family that covered all four walls of the living room. This collage of pictures managed to cover the entire developmental process of each child in the family from birth through high school graduation and marriage.

The respondents' lives revolve around family centered activities. They go for rides in the car, hunt and fish, play basketball, swim, attend their children's sporting events, volunteer as T-ball coaches, attend church and visit family. The children are the focus of their lives.

When the researcher asked the respondents what their purpose in life was they stated:

I'm here to support my kids and my wife, that's what I'm here for.

Family, that's about it. Material things aren't important anymore. I've found that you can do without material things. Family is important.

My family. If I didn't have my kids and my husband, I wouldn't have nothing. 'Cause my life is for my husband and my kids and my grand babies.

Just in knowing that I have done my best for the day to take care of my family. I mean I did all that I could do and it's just a feeling. When I'm gone and I come home and the kids come running up to me and they hug me and kiss me and say Dad we're glad you're home that just makes me feel good. They're the reason I'm doing it.

Many of the working poor people interviewed placed a high value on their faith in God and the meaning of work, but still the predominant concern in their lives was their children. For some people the goal is "Just makin' it though until they're (the children) old enough to take care of themselves." For others it is to see their children "get through," and succeed where they may have failed. As a young bus aide states, "I want to see my child accomplish something."

There's a feeling among some of the respondents that they themselves will never have anything and the best they can hope to accomplish is to fulfill the needs of their children. A plant worker states:

My wife and my kids. That's the most important thing. To see them...I don't care and my wife feels the same thing. We do without a lot of stuff between the both of us and stuff like that because we see that the kids get what they want. That makes us satisfied, you see...I don't care what I got or what I don't because we'll probably never have anything, you know. But as long as the kids got what they want, hey, that's enough right there.

There is a persistent hope that their children will not have to encounter the problems they have and that their struggles and suffering will make a difference in their childrens' lives.

They state:

You've seen my three year old. I brought her into this world and I'm going to support her and that's my main goal right now to bring her up in this life.

Maybe by the time she is my age things will be different because of people like me...and like you. 124

My purpose in life is to see my kids graduate, not get into trouble, bad trouble, try to get an education, get jobs and don't have to go through all the hell I'm going through today. That's what I want done.

My husband and the kids is all that's important. The kids turning out to be Christian with a good education and a decent life, you know, find them a nice wife to settle down with...Just knowing that we suffered and struggled to give the kids a better life.

Finally, several of the respondents talked about their love of hunting and more particularly the love they had for their hunting dogs. This kind of notion may seem trivial to some, but to a rural Appalachian hunting dogs are part of the family. One respondent talked to the researcher indepth about one of his beagles that almost died on the operating table. A saw mill worker talks about how important his dogs are to him:

**Saw Mill Worker:** I'm a real dog lover .That's my family. It's not a dog, it's family to me. If someone would do something to that dog they'd get hurt. I love that dog.

**Researcher:** If somebody was hurting that dog would you die for it?

**Saw Mill Worker:** I wouldn't go to that extreme, but they probably would (die). That's just the way I am. There's a bond. If you've had something 4 or 5 years and you take it hunting and it works good for you. It shows you that it loves you and stuff like that and that dogs never done nothin' but help you hunt...It's companionship and there's nothing but a bond between you two. It's pretty strong.

**Researcher:** Is it any different from a person?

**Saw Mill Worker:** I think they've got a lot better personalities than a human. That dogs never done anything to hurt me and there's people around here that have done stuff to hurt me. If you've got a good dog it will do nothing but help you. Man's best friend.

### Community

When studying the behavior of people who live in poor rural environments a frequently asked question is, "Why don't they just leave?" Research participants responded to this question by saying that they didn't know where they would go. Some people complained about the high costs of moving and others believed that the wages

earned in the city would not be sufficient to compensate for the high cost of living there.

Other participants remarked that they couldn't sell their homes for what they were worth due the poor housing market and would not be able to afford the cost of a new home in the city. Some people did try to leave by moving to Columbus, Pittsburgh, Texas and California, but they found themselves isolated when away from their family and friends. They also experienced a higher cost of living than they could afford on the wages they were able to earn. They then returned to southeastern Ohio, worse off financially than they were before they left.

The primary reason why working poor people don't leave southeastern Ohio appears to revolve around the concept of community. They fear an urban environment that they believe is too crowded, crime ridden, impersonal, drug infested and unsafe.

I can't drive in Pittsburgh. There's too many cars at one time.

Just the whole idea of kids having to go to school where they have armed guards in the schools (bothers me).

My in-laws lived in Cincinnati 8-9 years and they still didn't know their neighbors.

There's nothing here, but I like this better than having to drive 20 minutes in heavy traffic to get to work.

I think it's too many people. Columbus is growing. With people you have crime. You have stupid people, weird people. Here you know the stupid people and you know what to expect out of them...To me its safer. You can walk the streets most anywhere without getting harassed.

I don't know, as long as I can survive here I don't think we'll leave here. It's quiet. I think it's a decent place for the kids. I mean there is drugs around here, but drugs aren't that bad. Drugs are what scares me about the city and the high crime rate. I think it's easier to raise kids here than in the city.

They have a love for southeastern Ohio and the small towns and communities they live in that cannot be easily expressed by words. They feel secure here. They have a historical connection to these hills where many of their families were part of the original people that settled in the region in the 1700's over 200 years ago. As one wife of a



disabled worker said, "There is a certain love for this place. I'm trying to explain it so that you know what I mean in my heart and in my head." When others were asked why they don't leave the area they said:

Well, it's my home and I was gonna see it through. I was gonna either do it or die. That's the attitude I have. If they come in and they say alright George you're done, you've got to sell everything, I'd have sold 'em and then I'd have crossed that bridge.

Well...you have your roots and you have home and you have your family and you want to stick it out if you can, struggle to make it.

I don't move because I chose to live here. I like it. We work hard, but at least we work together and as long as we're together that's what's important.

There is strong sense of community spirit in rural southeastern Ohio. A plant worker talked about helping out and giving money to the victims of the flood disaster that occurred in nearby Shadyside, Ohio. As he said, "I didn't have much to give, but I gave some. That's why the valley is like that."

A caseworker states, "I do have some sense of security here and that's what keeps me here. You have to be strong (to leave) and I'm not sure I'm that strong. I think I could be but I don't know that I am at this point." A small, rural community provides people with a sense of security that cannot easily be replaced in the urban environment. Research participants talk about the importance of family, friends and the church in providing them with support when they were in need:

I'd be willing to move period if I could make it, but I feel safe right now because I have friends, I have the church to go to and I have family.

I don't know how to put it into words. It's just that your friends and family's here. Do you really want to leave? If you had the opportunity, can you leave your family and friends? Until that time comes...I don't know if I could. So I generally just stuck it out in this area because most of the family has been around here and anytime we got really down family has always come through.

We belong to a church...The people are very, very friendly. I know that if I could not put food on my table, I know I'd be ashamed to ask, but I know

them now and I wouldn't be ashamed. It is a loving community and we have friends. They treat me really nice and I really feel they care.

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People in small communities are able to maintain their sense of identity even when they encounter hard times and poverty. For example, a part-time secretary states:

Here you're a person and there (the city) you're just an inhabitant. I don't know. Here it's more personable. You don't feel like a nobody. And you can live here and not have money and still have friends. But you can't live out there (California) and not have money because people look down on you and you're not worth being a friend to.

They're also able to obtain credit in emergency situations even when they have had to file for bankruptcy because "your reputation in the community is known even when you don't have a lot of money." A grocery store clerk states:

If you're willing to make payments and pay things you don't have to sign your life away to get a little bit of credit at the hardware store or the gas station, you know. If we'd have been in Columbus and had a breakdown of our car like we did here, we would have been stuck. We would not have been able to go to work. We would not have been able to do anything. If you've got one thing paid, people trust ya.

Not only do respondents have the security of a strong support system in rural communities based on individual reputation, but they feel safe from harm. Respondents talk about leaving their houses unlocked and car doors open. A truck driver and saw mill worker talk about this sense of security that exists in the rural communities in which they live:

I think about this area there's just this sense of security, you know. It's just a feeling, a peaceful feeling that you can walk down the street and you don't have to worry that somebody's going to drive by and shoot ya just because you happened to be on the street at the wrong time.

This is not a bad place. There is really no crime or violence here. Like New York City...I like living around here. I think basically because I hunt around here and there's lots of woods around here. And I know everybody around here. It's like a homey feeling. In the city you'd see thousands of new faces everyday. Round here you drive down the street and you know everybody. I think it's security. You know everybody and you can talk to anybody just walkin' down the street. (If I lived in the city) I think I would be scared 'cause I never done it. I'd be scared. I wouldn't know what to expect.

And there is the ever present concern for the welfare of the children. Here respondents talk about not having to worry about their children when they go out somewhere and the fear of what might happen to their children if they were raised in an urban environment. A litter control supervisor comments:

But I know so many families that's moved away and their teenagers turned out terrible and on the streets and that, just simply because they don't have that security and my kids come first in my life.

### Religion and Faith

There were a few respondents in the study who had little faith in ministers and organized religion. They cited former religious leaders that had fallen in to disrepute such as Jim Baker. However, the majority of the respondents identified with the church and had a strong belief in God. Several of the respondents believed that their purpose in life revolved around a need to "serve and help others," or "be a Christian."

According to the Bible I'm supposed to be helping others. I want to be in a position where I can teach others maybe about the Gospel, maybe another way of life.

I think my purpose in life is to serve others. I didn't always think that way, but particularly in the past five years I don't think I was alive.

Being a Christian, helping others as much as we can, saving as many souls along the way.

But the Bible did say go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to all the creatures. To us that is the most important and selfless thing you can do and that is to go into the world and preach the gospel to anybody that we can. Anybody that we love or don't love, enemies or friends. That's the most important thing we could do for them and that is to help them find salvation through Christ.

Some believe that God actually provides them with material goods and support when they really need them. For example:

I believe that he (God) has been what's been behind our being able to make it...I really don't know where any of the money that has kept us going has come from.

I hate to dwell on religion, but we're a pretty religious family here. We've seen God take care of us so many times I think that helps. Two years ago we were virtually given Christmas. When we had nothing in the house to feed the kids last summer, the phone would ring and say, hey, you got this yard to mow and so you see that you are going to make it even though it's not an easy road.

So these are all things that God has seen that I didn't suffer while I'm going through my trials and tribulations. Because people are there opening doors for me that were not open for other people.

Others find that their faith in God is what keeps them going psychologically when they're feeling down. It helps them cope with the constant stress of not having enough money to do the things they need to do or purchase the things they need.

I didn't go to counseling. I found a better source. That of course was my peace with Jesus. He was my outlet. Because you can cry to him in silence. From your heart, from your head. From your whole soul...and he will give you the peace that I needed.

You just pray to the man upstairs hopin' that there will be changes made. That he can help us and bring something along that will change things.

Five years ago, no we couldn't (quit worrying about financial problems). But since we have both started believing that the Lord's gonna take care of us, yes we can, and before you might as well forget it. We went off the deep end.

We need God. If it wasn't for our faith, I don't think we'd of made it. That's why I feel so many people go out and commit suicide and get divorced and you know, because they don't have that faith in God and trust that everything will be ok. You've got to go through the valleys as well as the mountain tops.

I suppose it's my faith. And I use to cry all the time. I don't cry as much as I used to...to cry about my life, about things, I don't do that anymore. I might cry now because I feel bad about something but not because I don't see there's any hope. I'm really very optimistic, much more than I was 5 years ago.

A grocery store clerk states, "We are taught to be content with the lot that we have been given, no matter what the state, whether hungry, full or tired." With this comment the researcher was prompted to question several of the participants later in the study about the problems with this kind of statement. Questions of concern were the following: Are the poor more attached to religion than the upper class? Why do the upper class not appear to be as dependent upon religion for support as the lower class? Doesn't religion act as a kind

of narcotic (as Marx had suggested), that enables the poor to keep from feeling the pain of their poverty in hopes of a better after life? Doesn't this create a certain acceptance of their current poverty stricken situation that prevents any kind of working people's revolution from evolving that could place pressure on the system to change? With these questions, three different research participants quoted a passage from Matthew, 19:24: "

Again, I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (The Holy Bible, New International Version, 1984).

The researcher asked the respondents why they believed it was harder for a wealthy person to get into heaven. They responded by saying, "It's harder for a man who has power to accept that there is power beyond his control." Another respondent commented that rich people tend to think that they can take care of everything themselves and that they become self-centered and materialistic. This moves them away from God. When the researcher asked a respondent why God would let this happen to some and not to others she replied that Satan does not need to mess with the rich because he already has them, but the poor have to be tested further to try to win them over to evil.

In summary, the working poor people interviewed generally believed that the poor are more attached to religion, that the upper class is not as dependent upon religion for support, and that religion does help them cope with the pain of poverty for which they have few other resources to ease the pain. Thus, faith in God is a major source of strength for many of the working poor people of southeastern Ohio. Reliance upon faith does not appear to reflect acceptance of the respondents' situation, but rather it is a means by which they can maintain a sense of dignity and self-esteem without material wealth or occupational success.

### Work

For the working poor, work is an extremely important part of their identity.

I guess I was always taught if you work hard and you live a good life then things would work out.

Like she says, it's the values you were raised with, knowing you just have to get up and go to work. It's either that or not live.

Because the Bible says that a man will earn his keep by the sweat of his brow. To me if you want something you're gonna go out and work for it.

As long as I'm working that's my main thing, you know...When I'm not working that's when I get off the limit.

Many are grateful to have a job that gives them the opportunity to earn income, while others enjoy the chance to get out of the house and work with other people. A female factory worker talks about how her job improved her self-esteem:

You know, with this job I've got now, I feel so much better about myself than I ever did. You know, because I didn't think I could do it, because all I did was the waitress job before and now I'm a factory worker and it makes me feel good that I can do things like that.

Despite their low salaries many of them take pride in the work they do. A plant worker states that he derives the most satisfaction from:

Knowing that you're doing it and doing it right. I don't screw up at work too often. I'm just tired when I get home. And I do my job and I do it right. I hate getting yelled at at work.

However, there are many negative aspects to the work they are required to do: low wages, insufficient hours, hard work and fatigue, too many hours, stressful and dangerous work conditions, and limited or no medical benefits, vacation and retirement plans. In addition, there are feelings of powerlessness and sexist attitudes in the work place for some. A carpenter talks about the low wages:

I've just started out doing carpentry work and I've just picked up and picked up on it since then. Each year it gets a little better, but still it's nothing. We don't eat steak everyday, that's for sure.

A cook states:

I would do everything I could to create higher paying jobs, more higher paying jobs. I mean I think that the people that live as a cook, what I do, come home totally tired. I work just as hard if not harder than them guys workin' down at the plant pushin' the buttons and I don't even get half of what they make.

A truck driver talks about the stress of working the long hours required to make a living driving a truck:

If I didn't have to do it I wouldn't do it because the hours are too long and stressful and it doesn't leave any time for your family...How about if you leave the house at 2-2:30 in the morning and you don't get home until 6-7-8 the next night? And, you know that's just the hours involved in it. Most of the stress is a mental stress. You have to be alert all the time looking out for the other guy because you never know what that guy in that car's going to do. A lot of the people on the highways when they see that truck coming they'll pull out in front of it because you know I got that truck beat...when you're sittin' behind the steering wheel all day by the end of the day the back of your neck's all tight and your muscles all tense up from the mental part watchin'. You know, because it's not really that physical.

The stress and danger of working in a saw mill are discussed by a mill worker. He also talks about a fellow worker's suicide that may have been explained, at least partially, by these harsh working conditions:

I don't think I'll stay at a sawmill. If something better comes along I'm outta there. Saw mills are just stress and hard work no matter what job you got. It's dangerous out there. We had a guy commit suicide out there last Friday. I think it was a little job stress and his wife combined together. He came out in the night and dropped a loader fork on his chest to commit suicide. We come in the next day and found him when we was clockin' in.

A factory worker talks about the physical danger inherent in her work place:

I like it (work in the factory), but some of the people I don't like because they just play around and you can get hurt playing around. I almost cut off my thumb when I was cutting wire. They took me to the emergency room because it was bleeding.

A bookkeeper for a non-profit agency has to work two jobs to make a living and maintain her house payment:

I was sellin' magazines. I would go to work at 8 in the morning. Work till 4 and start the other job from 5 to 11. So I was gone all day and night. And he (the oldest boy) had to take care of my youngest son which he resented and that caused problems with us, but you had to do what you had to do.

When a plant worker is asked what he would do if he could do anything or be anything he wanted to be, he responds:

Any job where I wouldn't have to get my nails dirty. Sitting behind a desk, riding around in a car making money. Ah, something that I ain't got to suffer over when it's like 98 degrees outside and I gotta go to work and put a jacket and helmet on and sweat like a pig.

A waitress talks about being overloaded at work:

At Robinsons they had to cut down on hours. They didn't have a lot of girls so you were more pressured. You could run 15 tables, 10 tables, 5 tables and if everybody decided to be bitchy that day then you would have a hard time...the people that I worked with there were causing the stress.

A trucker and plant worker complain about the lack of benefits and retirement.

No benefits whatsoever. Well, I think our society has become like this anymore. Not just in trucking. It's in any industry where the employees are nothing but a number and what a good company can get out of you for X amount of years and you're done. When you're washed up they'll put another number in your place and that's ...I don't think it's right, but the whole society has turned to that way of thinking.

The retirement's bad over there. Their retirement is work until you drop, cause there ain't none. If you want to retire from there and live off of 35 bucks a month, go for it. That's it. I've seen guys over there work until they drop on the job. Died on the job!

A female factory worker talks about the sexist attitudes and discrimination that occur in the factory where she works:

**Researcher:** Is there discrimination towards women?

**Factory Worker:** Oh yes there is. At work there is.

**Researcher:** How is it at work?

**Factory Worker:** Well, if you're a guy you can get away with a lot where I work. The guys call this one girl fat hips or somethin' like that and they make all kinds of noises that distract her and make her upset and the other day they put her glasses on a high place where there's no way she could have got 'em and she went to the boss and the boss didn't say anything to them guys that did it.

**Researcher:** Is there sexual harassment?

**Factory Worker:** Yea.



**Researcher:** How so?

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**Factory Worker:** "I want to go to bed." This one guy whenever he talks this is all he says.

**Researcher:** Can you complain about that and get that to stop?

**Factory Worker:** I doubt it would do any good. I need my job. I just ignore him. I say you don't have enough money, but I'd never do it for money.

**Researcher:** But it makes you angry.

**Factory Worker:** It makes me angry and I just ignore it. I walk away from em.

**Researcher:** Have you ever seen any women stand up to one of these guys?

**Factory Worker:** No. Nobody stands up to nobody. We all take it.

**Researcher:** So, would you say that the women in this place are oppressed?

**Factory Worker:** Oppressed?

**Researcher:** Meaning that you all have to take a lot of crap.

**Factory Worker:** Right now... yes we do! (Laughter)

Later in the interview:

**Researcher:** Are there no pay raises?

**Factory Worker:** I think the guys are paid more than we do. I'm pretty sure they do.

**Researcher:** Doing the same job?

**Factory Worker:** No, they do different jobs, like one cuts brushes. In fact, I know they get paid more than we do because they have families they have to support, but I'm supporting a family right now so I should get paid more. But they have different jobs and they'll say it's a harder job or something. I don't know.

### Definition of Poverty

When the researcher asked a woman on welfare how she would describe being poor to people she said, "When you say you don't have any money, you mean you don't have money." For the working poor people, it is much more difficult for them to define

their state of poverty. Despite earning poverty level wages seven of the people in this study did not define themselves as poor. When asked the question, "Do you consider yourself poor?" they replied:

I don't think I'm poor, but I don't think I'm where I should be at 36. But that's because I came from a different lifestyle. I don't think of myself as poor, that thought never crosses my mind. Broke sometimes, but never poor.

You have to think that there is somebody worse off than you. You can't say that when you've got a car, and you've got a job and you've got your health. No, I don't think I'm poor.

No. As long as my kids got clothes and food that's all that counts. Well...we're getting back to material stuff, do ya know what I mean? If your talking dollar and cents, we were pretty close (laughter), but I never thought that I was poor. I just didn't have it. But as far as myself being poor, I never thought that I was poor.

I guess I make poverty level wages, below poverty wages. But to me I don't feel impoverished. You know what I mean?

I don't consider myself really poor. I just don't have it like I used to. I go to work everyday and I have money. I have a little bit of spending money. Not as much as I used to have. I can't save money like I used to. I've just had to adjust my lifestyle a lot.

The majority of the working poor people interviewed believed that they were poor, but most went to great lengths to explain how their financial poverty was balanced by a spiritual wealth. Others pointed out that there were other people "worse off." It appeared as if the respondents were attempting to prevent being labeled as poor. Their definition of poverty focused on what they had, rather than on what they didn't have. Their definition of what social class they belonged to was determined by their relationship to people who were "worse off" (the welfare recipients and homeless) rather than those people who were better off (the upper class). When these respondents were asked if they considered themselves poor, they said:

Financially yes, but in other ways no. I mean we have a good relationship in our family and to me that's a little more important than the money. You know, I'd like to be able to do more things for my family and my kids and take them on vacations or just go to Sea World. That would thrill them but

we can't afford to do that. Financially poor, but in other ways probably one of the richest men in the world. 136

Materially yea. Uh, we try not to as a family be any different. I mean if my kids got a problem I'll listen to them or we talk, but materialistic, yea I'd say we're pretty poor. But as far as the family getting out of hand not being happy, we don't let that deprive us of ourselves.

Financially sometimes, spiritually never. Yea, I think so. Just because poor is a relative term anymore. Because I'm not as bad off as some of these people that we serve. But I'm certainly not as well off as some of the people that support us. I basically believe that there isn't much of a middle class anymore and I think ultimately there won't be.

Monetary value sure, but as far as spiritual, no. I mean I have everything I need to have.

I'm making it. I don't see in the near future being out on the streets. I consider myself, I don't know if its poor, lower class you might want to say. I mean we don't have extras. We have the money to buy what's necessary and that's it. There's no money for extras. There's money to make it and that's exactly what we're doing, we're making it.

I consider myself...I seen a lot worse. I consider myself fortunate to some and unfortunate to others.

Whenever I think that we're bad off I think that there's somebody worse off than we are and there are tons of people worse off than we are. We've got a roof over our head. We've got food on the table. It might not be the best all the time but we still have food on the table. We're healthy. It could be a lot worse.

There's always somebody that's in worse shape. I don't even care if I was on welfare and stuff like that. Ah, never did work, lived like a bum like a lot of people I see. Ah, there's always somebody in worse shape.

Then there are the people who unashamedly define themselves as poor without reservations.

Yea, definitely. I don't have a dime in my pocket. If we paid all our bills on time, we'd be in the hole to start. There is no money left over.

Yep. Very. When you come home and you get paid one night and you come home and cash your check and you're broke the next day, you're poor. I don't even look for payday. Everybody, oh I can't wait till pay day. I don't look forward to pay. Honest to God I don't, cause it goes in one hand and out the other.

I never really thought about that. Yea, I guess I am. I am poor.

A few of the respondents in the study define themselves as middle class despite earning poverty level income, being in debt and not having a savings account. In an attempt to better understand the respondents perception of what the term middle class meant to them, the researcher asked the following question: "What does middle class mean to you?" The respondents talked about what they increasingly didn't have, i.e. high income, savings accounts, late model automobiles, money to take vacations, homes with nice furniture, and a cash reserve to pay bills on a regular basis without fear of having your utilities disconnected. They responded with the following comments:

I think it's owning a mobile home, or buying a home probably around \$40,000. Having a car and a house of furniture and maybe money in the bank. Not a lot of money, but money to fall back on in case something happened.

They are able to pay their bills pretty much on time without having to worry and still have a little left over to do other things.

I think that the mainstream of America is the middle class. I really do. Because you have the one's that are filthy rich and you have the one's that are dirt poor and I just feel that everyone else is middle class. They're makin' it. They might be broke two days before payday, but...and they might have all their charge cards charged to the tilt, but to me that's the middle class.

I don't actually believe that there is a middle class anymore. It's either you've got some money and you're rich or you don't have it and there's no, I don't see any in between. There's two kinds of people. There's the haves and the have nots.

Being comfortable and not having to worry about your bills. Not having to worry about where the money is coming from to pay your bills. And if you need something you don't have to worry about well, if I write this check it's going to bounce and am I going to make enough money to cover it.

Probably 30 to 40 thousand dollars a year and have a few cars and a two car garage and a nice home with probably a thousand dollar payment. Having a savings account set aside.

I'd say lower class, they don't know what's goin' to happen. I mean they can't even live day to day in my opinion, you know. They gotta survive. Middle class I don't think you have to survive. You know you're gonna survive.

We fit in the lower part of the middle class. We don't have the luxury of taking off a week, staying in a hotel, eating meals out. And to me that is

either your middle class or your upper middle class that can actually take a vacation.

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I think, in my opinion, middle class is someone like my boss. Her and her husband they both consider middle class comfortable. I don't consider myself that way. They have the means to do what they have to do. They have medical benefits. They have money to buy groceries. They don't have to worry about no disconnection notices on the door. Ya know, that type of thing. If you need some clothes you go out and buy em, ya know. I don't consider myself middle class.

In all the interviews and time spent in the field very little comment was made about the upper class or elite of society. It's as if they did not exist in the world of the respondents. A female bookkeeper makes an interesting observation that may help explain the powerlessness the respondents feel when they think about the local elite and their ability to effectively change the current inequities between them:

I think if they work for it they deserve it. I think a lot of people who grow into it. They were born into it. There's no work done in their life and they probably never will. I think that's awful, ya know, but what can you do? You can't do nothin' about that.

There exists between the respondents and the upper class a great social distance which creates a boundary that makes it difficult for them to assess their relationship with the upper class. On the other hand, the respondents have predominantly negative attitudes towards people on welfare even when they themselves for periods of time have had to accept welfare benefits to survive. They believe that the people on welfare would rather "stay on welfare than really work." As a young grocery store clerk notes, "It's wanting to stay on it (welfare) the rest of your life as opposed to us (the working poor people) who would like to be off of it." The respondents see themselves as different from the people on welfare in that they keep trying to do something about their condition whereas the people on welfare don't want to help themselves. They state:

Some people know they can't do nothing about it and they won't do nothing about it. They don't even try to do nothing about it. I'm trying to do something about it, ya know.

They are used to being on welfare to the point that they don't want off of it. They could help themselves even if its a job by flippin' hamburgers. They don't want to help theirselves. They don't even think about a job...That's what they want to do, but I'm different. 139

It makes me angry when I see there are people on welfare who may be doing better than me. But there's nothing more that you can do about it. I think it's just a mental attitude. You will very rarely see somebody from a welfare family who does better themselves for whatever reason.

The respondents criticize the people on welfare for not doing anything about their situation.

The difference of being poor, knowing you're poor and not doing anything about it and being poor and knowing your poor and trying to do something about it. There's a lot of people who accept being on welfare and they won't try to go out there.

Cause they have food stamps, they get medical. That medical card is worth as much as I make. That's all. Main thing of welfare with me is they have the benefits there and don't even try, you know.

The respondents see the welfare poor as having everything handed to them while they have to struggle to make ends meet and often are ineligible for many of the social programs that the welfare poor can take for granted. A litter control supervisor states:

You know they make it hard on the man that is trying and the guy that doesn't give a hoot if the sun comes up tomorrow, ya know. He's got the life of Riley and everything's handed to him as long as he goes up and signs each month for it. And I don't even want that. I'm just saying politically help me out.

In general, the respondents believe that the welfare poor are living off the system and that they are making more money than them despite their efforts at work.

They're livin' off the system and they'll come out and say, hey, did you ever see the movie on the VCR? And I'll say man I don't even have a VCR. Well here are these people, lifers on the program I call them. They've got VCRs, satellites and ham radios and they set up all night and talk while the working man's got to sleep and get up and go to work. And ya know, and they got all this. When I was working I couldn't afford a VCR. It's discouraging for me, ya know.

There are a lot of people around here that do nothing all the time and they got more money than I do and I don't know why. They drive better cars. The people on welfare they drive a lot better vehicles than I drive. I don't know.

What gets me that these people on welfare for a long period of time they dress better than I do. Pisses me off. It just gets me totally fired up. It doesn't pay to be honest.

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The respondents see the welfare poor as "having babies so they can get more." They also believe that in many cases they drink all night and then make a living stealing things from other working poor people who are "working their guts out for the meager wages their makin' and gettin' ripped off." The welfare poor are viewed as the "laziest people in the world." A waitress states, "What makes me mad is these other people that go out there and abuse the system and are sitting on their ass not doing one damn thing about it."

There is a concern for the generational poverty that the respondents see in welfare families that live in their communities. They are particularly hostile towards people they refer to as "total welfare" people or "professional welfare recipients."

There are families, ya know, like wealth is passed around in some families, welfare is passed on in these families. These parents grow up teaching their kids how to work the system and they learn to work the system and they have more money than she or I will ever see.

I know people that has lived, generation after generation, since I was a kid on welfare all their life, ya know. And ah, got everything they need, full medical, full hospitalization, full dental...

They don't want to better themselves and they're in a cycle where they've lived like this for years. They've got kids and they're teaching them that this is the way that you are to live.

I know this one fellow up town. I don't know him personally, know him to see him, know of him. All his life, his folks before him was on total welfare and he's another generation welfare. I talked to this one boy and I tried to get him to go to school and he says, "Na, I can't afford to get off this total welfare."

There was a small group of respondents who stated that their attitudes about welfare and people on welfare had changed since they had come upon hard times of their own.

Maybe somehow this is the best thing that ever happened to me. Before I judged people because they were on welfare. They're just bums or whatever. I can see the problems related to it. I won't be so quick to judge people the next time. Certain situations can cause a lot of problems.

I'll never tell a young girl in my job, honey you can make it. You don't need that pimp. How do I know what her needs are? I keep my mouth shut

now. These are things I learned through 15 months of harshness. There is always something coming when you are poor that you've always got to keep struggling for, struggling for. And they don't have a bank account. 141

There's always gonna be users, but 99 percent of the people out there are struggling. They're hurting. They're not users.

I don't think so much anymore (that people on welfare are stigmatized). Because there's so many people in the same situation. But in years past I believe that people did look down on you if you were on welfare.

For some, there is the notion that welfare people also work even though they don't have jobs that provide them with a wage. A member of a local Habitat for Humanity Board stated that they had a meeting and they were trying to decide if people on welfare should be considered as recipients for housing. She responded to them by saying:

And I said why not? I said what the hell do you think. What makes you think people on welfare don't work? Honey, let me tell you how hard they work. They work every minute of everyday just to survive. And if you don't think that's work you try it for a day.

The researcher asked this board member why she believed working poor people were so angry and hostile towards welfare recipients whom they had more in common with than the middle class whom they generally were more accepting. She states:

I think the anger is misdirected. It's just like the poor steal from the poor. They don't steal from the rich. I think it's misdirected and that's a struggle to overcome. Because...I've had friends that felt the same way and it's difficult to discuss it with them, let alone to change them.

### Welfare

At the time of the interview, a little less than half of the research participants were utilizing some form of welfare or government assistance such as housing. And most of the other half who were not currently using welfare assistance had used it in the past. Thus, most of the participants were quite familiar with the welfare system. However, in this case familiarity breeds contempt. It is safe to say that the welfare system was the most talked about and most negatively viewed of all the potential support systems for the respondents. The attitude that the respondents hold toward the welfare system can be summed up quite



succinctly by a young, female bookkeeper who said, "And I don't know. I just think the system (welfare) sucks. I think it does." While one person did comment that the system treated him fairly and several of the women in the study stated that they were not embarrassed when they used welfare benefits such as food stamps, the overwhelming majority of the research participants expressed real concern with the stigma that welfare places on an individual and their family. Many of the respondents would not apply for welfare benefits or when they did it is only as a last resort.

Speaking of food stamps my husband was so ashamed that first he didn't want to apply for welfare and he kept trying to not have to do it. And then it would be you go down and fill out the papers. And then there were times where he had to go. They wanted to see him too. We had to watch these movies and stuff, but he would not go to the grocery store unless I gave him the money to spend.

And then when I went to the welfare office, I thought why did I have to go beg to these people for help. It was embarrassing because I never had to beg before.

It finally got to the point that when there was nothing in here to eat and we didn't have any money to buy anything I said my kids gonna eat and if you don't want to go I will.

I was to the point that I was ready to go out and steal before I would go on welfare, but we just got to do this.

It's embarrassing. We was on it I'd say about 5 years ago, off and on, off and on. I guess I have too much pride, but when the kids got to eat, they've got to eat. And when you can't find a job there's nothing you can do.

They talk about the embarrassment of using food stamps:

I've got food stamps before when the mines were out and I didn't like to do that, but it would bother me goin' to the store and usin' the food stamps...I'd have to go out of town, at least where nobody knew me I could use them.

Then you go to the store and you see somebody from church and they're behind you in the line and it doesn't make you feel very good to pull out your food stamps. When you cash your ADC check, it doesn't make you feel great. You hate to do it. It almost makes you feel low. But I try to keep a stiff upper lip and go along with it. Maybe it won't be forever.

And one day we had a huge fight. I forget what it was we were going after. I think it was a gallon of milk and I said I wasn't feeling good or something it is all that I need, ya know, and he said I'm not goin' out there. I said then go home and the kids can do without. I was mad and he drove home and we fought all the way and he turned around and went in the grocery store and he said don't you ever ask me to do that again. But this is his attitude. He was so ashamed of being on welfare. 143

It's real embarrassing going into a grocery store and telling them you have food stamps and trying to pull them out of those little books. You just shake. People stare at you and look at you. Usually you try to think of welfare people who are dirty and their kids don't have decent clothing.

The wife of a working poor truck driver talks about the basic difference between men and women when it comes to applying for and using food stamps.

He feels like he's failing because he's not providing. Where its not my job. I'm the nurturer of the family. To me nurturing is making sure that there is food on the table and I don't care how we get it, you know, because my kids are gonna get fed. And I think it bothers men more than...you very seldom see a man in the grocery store using food stamps.

Another woman describes her attitude towards welfare and defends her use of benefits:

I'm not afraid to stand at a grocery store. I know people that go out of town grocery shopping because they use food stamps. I look at it this way. My husband worked for 15 years before he was laid off. We've been married 18 years. We earned every dime of this federal assistance that we're getting. And we're not just sitting back doing nothing. We're working for our future.

After listening to the respondents complain about welfare recipients making more money than them, the researcher asked the following question: Why don't you just give up and go on welfare permanently? They replied:

Because I don't want to be a welfare recipient the rest of my life. There is no hope when you're on welfare of doing any better. At least if you have a job there is a little bit. It might not be a lot but it's something.

Because I don't think my kids...I don't think they would like it and I know I wouldn't like to be on welfare completely.

I guess I wasn't brought up that way. I don't like to depend on it. I like to try and make it on my own.

Because I don't want to live on welfare. I was raised on welfare and I want my kids to be raised better. I want them to grow up with some responsibility. I don't want them to think well they can all go down and get

on welfare. I think you should work for a livin'. That's not living. That's existing and I want to do more than just exist. If I'd give up and go on welfare, I'm defeating my own purpose. 144

I suppose that we were raised with values. Her dad being the type of man he was and the type of work he did. My dad worked all those years. You just didn't have anything given to you. If I wanted something, I worked for it.

I think it defeats the purpose of why you're out there busting your ass everyday. My husband is dead set against it, as far as getting the food stamps. He was basically raised by his grandparents and they were people who believe in working hard and he didn't ask for anything from anybody and those are the values that he got.

Probably pride. You want more than that. You want to teach your kids a little more than that. That's the easy way out maybe, you know. Too honest.

Well, one thing we've got a little more pride than that. I don't want to live on the system like that. Although I'd like to have their system while I needed the help. I guess a lot of dreams that are still there, but I know they're never going to happen, ya know.

It is important to note that the stigma of welfare does not end with food stamps and welfare checks . There is stigma attached to "free school lunches" and "living in the zoo". A secretary states:

The ones in grade school, the two little ones it didn't bother them when they got their free lunches. But Nancy took lunch money everyday because it's different in high school. You just don't get a free lunch in high school because you're getting in front of everybody.

Government housing units become stigmatized as "the zoo" and other negative terms filled with connotations. A working poor woman states:

Everybody knows that everybody that lives there gets some kind of welfare. We live in a house. You don't drive past here and say oh, I know that the people who live there get welfare. But it's an embarrassment for some of the people who live in those apartments to say they live there because they're admitting that they are on welfare.

The problems with the welfare system from the respondents' perspective are many and varied. They complain about the incompetent managers of the welfare offices, being ineligible for many of the services due to earning slightly too much money, the tendency of

the system to foster dependence rather than independence, inadequate benefits, loop holes in the system, the inadequacy of the monthly reporting system for working people, and the non-availability of information about welfare services.

Some of the respondents believe that the criteria for determining eligibility for welfare services is not administered fairly to all people who apply. A carpenter and bus aide comment on the administration of their local programs:

I have mixed emotions about the welfare system. I don't want to be on welfare. The people that run it, I don't know. Some of them I don't even think I would ask. That's just my personal opinion that some of the people that sit there and run it and I feel that in this county that you have to be established to get on welfare.

I think there could be a better system. I think a lot of people are qualified. I think a lot of them make their own judgements and aren't qualified to do so. They look at a person and judge them by their looks or the way they talk, not by their needs. I really don't care for them a bit. I think welfare is a needed program, but it is not run correctly.

The spouse of a working poor truck driver expresses her anger with a system that fails to take into account the special needs of working people:

I get very irritated with the welfare system. Here are these big shots driving Cadillacs, living in nice homes, not worried about how they're going to pay their phone bill because they're afraid that it's going to be shut off. They're telling us that you can live off of this amount of food stamps and this amount of money and every case is different. And if they're saying it can be done, it can be done...I would challenge them to try it.

A number of people complained about the difficulty working poor people have establishing eligibility for welfare benefits because they own a car or they earn slightly too much money. A farmer talks about not being able to obtain any financial assistance because he owns farm land which would have to be sold off to establish eligibility for benefits:

**Farmer:** They want us to sell our farm. You mean that we actually need for our business, we needed the pasture, we would have to sell it. Yes. She said they want you to have nothing. No kind of cushion at all. They want you down to the bare nothing. And they keep telling me that they want people to go out and make a livin' for themselves, ok. They're tellin' me that she's not wantin' to give me a chance. You sell everything, where you've got nothing and we're gonna take care of you. Now face it that's what it was. Actually I'd

have been better off, quote I guess you could say, to have sold everything and to have gone on welfare and food stamps and then stayed on them. I'd have been better off. And to me this is stupid. Like I told her, just give me the food stamps long enough until I get goin' again, we're not gonna take em no more, I guarantee ya, because I don't want them in the first place. I was so mad that I wanted to rip everything up and throw it right at the lady and walk right out the door. But knowin' she was doing her job and that's the rules. It wasn't really her fault and that's the only thing that saved her.

**Farmer's Wife:** His sisters kept tellin' him to go and apply for food stamps. They said we think you outta go. So we did and they turned us down. I was so mad when we left that office. We fought with ourselves for months not wanting to give up on ourselves and go on food stamps. And then finally we say we'll go and we'll try, ya know, and then they say, well, sell the farm, ya know.

Two other respondents talk about being ineligible for benefits because they owned automobiles:

And as soon as you lose everything they'll help you. As soon as you're completely down on the bottom. What happened to us is that we had a brand new luxury car, an 85 Olds Delta 88. And it was valued at \$10,000. Well, when he first got laid off it didn't matter if we had a dime in the bank or whatever, we had that car and it was valued at more than they would allow you to have and they would not give us anything. That's when I wrote and told my congressman I said, hey, give us six months. Then I'll either sell my car or I'll have something, but they wouldn't give us anything. You just can't go over night and trade your car in.

I first got unemployed and we were turned down, I had a 77 Ford pick up at the time I think. I think I owed \$5000 on it and I owed more than the vehicle was worth and they told me there was enough equity there if I sold that I could live on it. I said fine, you want to buy it and that was about the extent of it.

There is a strong belief among the respondents that the welfare system fails to help people help themselves and promotes welfare dependency in others who are not working as hard.

I feel that welfare kind of discourages people from workin' to tell you the truth. So you never can really get ahead. And I just feel that kind of discourages people to work. I worked enough so I could at least keep my medical card and that's the main issue.

I know people that live on welfare. They get HUD to pay their rent. They get utility subsidies. They get food stamps. They get medical benefits. They get everything possible. They get WIC. They give em milk. They get all that. It doesn't pay them to go and get a job. So they're not going

to. I know people that's doing a lot better than I am. I've had thoughts of even quittin' and goin' on welfare. 147

Welfare don't really give you any incentive. Even the companies want a good employee but they don't want to give you health benefits or give you a half decent wage. Welfare, I don't know how much money they gave us, \$380 some dollars a month, plus the medical benefits. You couldn't beat them, you know. They paid prescriptions. I've got to pay for my own right now. There's no incentive to get off of it.

While complaining that welfare provides people with too much support which promotes welfare dependency, other respondents complained that welfare didn't consider all the bills people have to pay, that food stamps were inadequate for a large family, of the inability to purchase cleaning supplies with food stamps, and the lack of subsidized, low-income housing. They also complained that child support payments are absorbed by the welfare department leaving little additional income for the respondent.

They complained about the rigidity of the welfare system and how it prompts people to cheat to survive and make ends meet on the limited partial support that working poor people can receive. They report the following:

A person can make out like a bandit if they don't want to be honest. You know, we ain't gonna live that way. We've lost things just because we were honest. I've known a lot of people who said hell, I ain't gonna tell them about this.

They force people to cheat welfare and do things behind their back and stuff. Because if you have anything of value and they want you to get rid of it before they help you out and that's wrong.

I don't claim everything I make because if I did I'd be stupid. I claim 3 dollars an hour and I'm actually making more than they think I'm making so that's a thing you can't prove. But if I were to tell them I'd be totally stupid. Because if you think about it, 413 dollars, how can you live?

The monthly reporting system is criticized for being inflexible and particularly difficult for working people. As a part-time grocery clerk states, "when we really need the money it's not there. When we don't need the money, it's there." A waitress reports that "they don't realize that what you make one month is not what you make the next month." The primary problem for working people is that the amount of hours worked per month is unpredictable. Unfortunately, under the current monthly reporting format, if a working

person gets insufficient hours of work in February and had a good month in January, their benefits will be cut back in March and they will not be able to increase their assistance until the following month of April. Meanwhile, these people may have little or no cash reserves to live on because few are able to maintain a savings account of any kind on their meager wages.

Other working poor people discussed the difficulty in understanding the system and what benefits they were entitled to. A bus aide states:

When I first went for help it was like running into a brick wall. Going to the welfare human services it's like you gotta hunt for the things you need. The things aren't offered to you on a silver platter. They don't tell you all the programs (that) are available. They don't sit down and say here are all the things you are eligible for. I'm still waiting to hear from HUD. I applied almost a year ago. It's just hard to figure who's willing to listen, who's willing to help, who's gonna help and who's trustworthy.

#### Government, Politicians and Voting

While there are a few exceptions, in general, the respondents have a negative attitude about the government, politicians, and the voting process. A cleaning man is appreciative of what the government has done for him, but acknowledges that "that there are other parts of the government that I don't want to talk about." The respondents complained that the government doesn't help, ignores, and hassles them. They believe that the government has their "priorities messed up", have the wrong people in office, and really don't care about their constituents. They state:

The government emphasizes a lot about families. About how we should stay together, but they don't help you with programs that give you help to stay together.

I think that the government, the state, the whole country should look at us here, ya know, instead of dealing with everybody else that they can't afford to feed. They better start worryin' about the people that's already here. I think you should help others, but don't forget everybody either, ya know.

I've gone to agencies and they treated me like shit. You know, one day I came to a fellow and I asked for a supervisor because I thought if you're treating me like this I can't imagine how you'd treat a person off the street.

A lot of hassle. Even the paperwork. When I was workin' on the paperwork for these things, it takes anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour and a half depending on the directions. You have all the information there. Your social security, your college funds, it goes on and on and on.

I think they got their priorities messed up somewhere along the line. That's the way I feel about it.

The people they have in government anymore, it's just like a dog-eat-dog world there anymore. It's whoever gets there first that's who gets it. And it is the poor people who usually suffer for it, because by the time it gets to them there is nothing left.

It seems to me that the government is for the big guy and the ones down here that they don't have anything for the middle people. I just think it's a lax system here. The bureaucrats here don't care.

Ya know, they're just content to let this county slide along and go through, ya know, and let them live that way for the rest of their life. It's always one of the first counties in the state of Ohio for poverty.

So I don't deal with them. I doer all myself. I stay away from the government as much as I can. And usually anything with the government, you're gonna git her. Somewhere down the line they're gonna stick it to ya and it works that way.

Only one individual had a positive story to tell about an experience with a politician.

So I wrote to him (the congressperson about her girlfriend's government sponsored apartment that didn't have a stove that worked and the walls falling in) and yes, he did send a letter back to me and it was taken care of. I like him. He's pretty good.

However, most of the respondents were very cynical about politicians. They are frustrated with politicians whom they believe don't know, understand nor care about their situation.

They don't want to admit there is a problem. If there is a problem they would have to work on it. They don't admit there's a problem. They're fine the way they are. Why should they worry about us? I don't think they really concern themselves with us.

There's one plant and a couple of coal mines still operating with a handful of men and they must think that the economy is boomin' down here, I don't know. I don't think they realize it's this way. They can't. Either that or they just don't care and they want to keep it this way and they don't want industry or progress down here.

I heard that one of the representatives didn't understand what these people down here wanted. Said we was belly aching all the time. They're just going to have to open their eyes and see what's going on down here. I'm sure they don't know. I don't think they care.



I know politicians...if their heads wasn't attached to their shoulders they'd leave it home everyday. Because 5 minutes after you're done talking to them, you might as well hang it up. They forgot all about you. 150

Far as politicians go they'll promise you everything and once they get in there it's all a bunch of...it's who you know. I ain't gonna vote this year, that's the way I feel. I'm tired of it, you know.

Only thing they do is make a lot of promises to win the election. Here's what I can't understand. They shoot rockets up. They can do that. I think what they think is we're giving these poor people money to live and food on the table, that's all they need so they're keeping the rest of the money to themselves.

I think they're more concerned with getting elected and makin' a name for themselves. I think the only time they really care is election time. I think after that they think it's done and over with.

They're not gonna help ya, they got their knees under the desk and they don't want to worry about me.

Candidates, seems to me, are in there for themselves and they don't care about the little guy. I don't think.

I don't think they care. No, I don't have any trust in them.

The legislature doesn't. They don't even care about (this) county.

They view politicians as "crooks" who will promise the people anything to get elected and then do whatever they wish once elected.

I feel that politicians are crooked. If they weren't so crooked I think things would be a lot better. I mean they're the ones that is the cause of a lot of stuff. I mean they control the economy. Why don't they sit down...they're makin' more money than us middle class people or even people poorer than me. Why don't they try to fit in our shoes once in a while and see what it's like. They've never been in this situation. So really they don't know, so I feel they don't care.

Most people have a bad feeling about politicians altogether and believe that they're crooked anyway.

I'm not registered to vote because it's a joke. There's a little bit of me that feels guilty because I think I should vote, but then I look at it and I feel that if I could write in who I know could do the job, but to go in and vote for somebody that I have had to listen to and to know that they are lying, you know, straight down the line, there is nobody that I can trust to do that. My dad's philosophy was always if they aren't corrupt when they go in they will be by the time they get out. And there's nobody I've ever seen that wasn't.

We're losing more and more freedom, especially the poor. It seems like the laws are there to benefit the people making the laws and not ourselves. I think politics...politics runs our whole life to begin with. I'd like to see that change somewhat. You always hope that maybe some honest person would get in, but they're always a bunch of crooks. 151

Local government officials such as the county commissioners are often seen as incompetent and incapable of assisting the community in developing an industrial base to improve the employment situation. An owner of a small store who was earning poverty level income with his business told the researcher that one of the commissioners in his county could not read or write. The owner of a small grocery store in another county stated that the county commissioners in his county were usually retired from other jobs and were overwhelmed by the demands of the office. They did not understand the complexities of seeking funding and assistance from state and federal agencies and they were unwilling to attend economic development meetings that were held outside of the county. They tended to be very parochial in their interests and could not agree among themselves how to solve the problems of the community. Others commented that the county commissioners in their county were basically looking out for themselves and stated that their primary purpose was to provide some form of patronage in terms of local government jobs to their friends and cronies. The respondents talk about the competence of their county commissioners:

I've been registered to vote in the last two years and it probably doesn't make any difference. Our county commissioners are a joke and that's where I felt my vote didn't count.

They're worthless. They're worthless. I hate to say it, but yea they are.

I don't think they act very smart up there. They should, ya know, they need to offer companies a piece of property or something. I think all of our commissioners around here are not very educated at all. I think they'd be afraid that somebody would come in and push them out, that's what I would say...They're nice people. They got in there because they know everybody and everybody voted for them. It's not because they're qualified. They just know everybody. That's why I believe there are no jobs in this county because they ain't got the smarts to bring them in here.

Despite the overall negative attitude the respondents hold towards the government officials and politicians many still believe in the democratic process, particularly at the local level, and see voting as a right and a privilege. These people register to vote and vote regularly on local, state and federal candidates and issues. When asked whether it does any good to vote they state:

I do believe it does. I really do. I think, we've got to keep struggling. I still believe in that part of the system. I think it can work, but it's going to take a whole lot more than just you and I doing it. It's going to take a lot of voter registration and campaigning.

I think if more people would vote...I think a lot of people think well what's the point because, ya know, it's fixed or whatever, whoever's gonna get in there anyway. I don't think that's true. I think if everybody would vote then the right people would get in. Maybe not the right people. I don't know how to say it. I think it's good to vote. I think it's your right to do it and you should do that for your country, for yourself...

Local issues like our school levy our vote makes a difference because they're very very close. The presidential election. It didn't make diddley squat whether we voted for Bush or Donald Duck. I mean it didn't make a difference. But little things, the very very local things it does make a difference.

Yes. Especially in this area. In this area it counts. Voting counts in this area.

Other people vote but don't believe it does any good to vote. A carpenter states:

I voted in every election for the past 9 years. But I don't believe it does any good. I do it because it's one way to tell somebody you don't like them. That's about it. I'm ready to change my politics anyway.

Finally, a large number of the respondents have given up on the utility of the political system and do not see themselves as having any impact on it. They do not register or vote in elections.

Ah, quite often I don't think it does much good. I know that's a bad attitude to have but I just can't help but feel that way sometimes. You vote for somebody and they get in there and they don't fulfill the promises. It seems that nobody who's in office...it don't really change that much.

No. I don't vote for nobody but myself. That's it. I don't need nobody...I don't care who's in office because it's gonna be the same thing.

It doesn't help the poor people.

Well you see in the paper all the things that's goin on that these...How can you go out and vote for them and see what they're doing to the state? The proper people that run these states are gone. These new generations that are coming up, they're not worth puttin' into office and voting for.

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I've never really decided to vote because I feel sometimes, what good is it? If you do vote it may have an affect or it may not have an affect. I feel that if somebody's gonna get in there it's because they got money. That's the way I feel. So why should I take my time, waste my gasoline and go check no for certain people when you know darn well that that person you want is not gonna get there because that guy that is runnin' against has got more money...My vote ain't gonna count nothin' because I ain't got the money to back this guy up. That's just the way I feel.

The researcher asked these respondents what it would take to get them to participate in the voting process and they replied:

Somebody who's out there now or somebody who gets in there I say within the next 10 years...that's lived in our shoes and knows what we're goin' through now, that's gonna make a difference.

I would have to know the man personally for me to vote for him and know what kind of guy he is, but that's what it would take to get me to vote.

### Health Care

Health care is a major concern for the working poor people of southeastern Ohio, particularly those who earn too much money to qualify for welfare assistance that would make them eligible for the medical card, a government sponsored health insurance program for poor people. Employers are canceling their group medical coverage or forcing their employees to carry a larger share of the insurance premium. The respondents cannot afford to maintain the insurance premiums due to their low wages. Other employers only hire workers on a part-time basis which prevents them from qualifying for the company insurance plan and saves the employers money, but leaves the employees without any

health insurance. These new trends have left many working poor people without medical insurance.

We have no hospitalization. He (the husband) went back to work for the same man he was working for, the same man that he was working before he got laid off. But the gentlemen dropped all of his hospitalization that he was carrying. If you want it you have to take it out privately. We can't do that. Right now he needs an echocardiogram done and there's no insurance and we can't have it done because if we have it done we're facing another medical bill we can't pay.

I don't have no insurance. I can't get...couldn't get any kind of hospitalization or any kind of insurance for a couple of months at a time to take care of this because it is one of those pre-existing conditions.

No. Here I don't make enough money. My job provides it but you have to work 40 hours per week to get it (participant is never allowed to work more than 30 hours per week).

They live in fear that their families will be struck with a physical illness or injury that will jeopardize their tenuous financial stability.

We went 2-3 years without any insurance and that was scary.

We been lucky (that no one's been hurt), but if something does happen I know we're in trouble.

The only thing I worry about like if there's sickness or something. I don't have no kind of medical insurance.

Some of the respondents are able to maintain medical insurance but only at great expense.

A painter spends 300 dollars a month for hospitalization. A litter control supervisor pays \$180 a month out of his 580 dollar a month income for medical insurance. A parts manager complains of having her premium on her insurance policy at work increase from \$48 to \$140 a month over a 3-year period of time. A bus aide who is a single parent mother is forced to quit her job because the insurance provided by the agency where she worked increased from a rate of \$84 a month in December to \$184 a month in January.

She states:

Ya know, I tried. I struggled with that job for months. I struggled with that job. Going to work and coming back home twice a day. Trying to fit in school in between. Trying to find a baby-sitter. Trying to find time for my daughter in between and get a baby-sitter for her that I could trust. And...you've gotta put a line somewhere.

Not only is the insurance costly, but in many cases it's coverage is quite limited.

Now she has a little bit of hospitalization through work, which she pays, it's fairly cheap, she pays like \$50 a month I think, a little more. Now it's just major medical and it only pays hospitalization. We took the boy to the emergency room a month or so ago and we thought he had appendicitis, and it wouldn't pay, so that's a hundred some dollars we've still got to pay.

Right now all I have is Physician's Mutual that only covers if I go into the hospital, but no emergency care.

Due to the high cost of medical care, much of which must be borne by the respondents themselves due to limited or no insurance coverage, they tend to avoid seeking dental or medical treatment until it is absolutely necessary.

I never did go to the dentist probably because I couldn't afford it. One tooth was hurting when I was working down there. Down where I'm at now. It was hurting really bad and I told him I wanted to come down and have him pull my tooth. He said it would probably cost about \$90. At that time I didn't have \$90 and it quit hurting so I never went back.

I haven't been to a dentist since I don't know when, a long time. My wife's got a tooth in her mouth that caused her infection and stuff like that and it cost about \$80 to get it out. That's when I called about 3 years ago and made her go to the dentist.

I haven't seen a dentist in 15 years. I'm just very fortunate I have good teeth. It's probably been 6 years since my kids have seen a dentist.

I haven't seen a dentist for 10 years or so.

I mean it has to be a total must. I've had urinary infections. I drink water and cranberry juice for a week and then it gets so bad it hurts so bad you have to go. You have to find the money where you can.

A few of the people in the study were able to qualify for the medical card. Even these people encounter problems because many physicians and dentists are unwilling to accept

the medical card as payment for services creating a hardship on rural people who may have to travel 50 miles or more for treatment.

It's hard to find a doctor that will take a medical card. You have to go to a place where you have to sit for hours before you get in there which is very hard when you have a kid. Most doctors don't take a medical card so you're really getting a lot of people that's in there with it.

There are only a couple of dentists that will accept the medical card, that's Dr. Buller and there's another one around here that I don't know his name. But there's none around here that will (take care of) his tooth (because it) is right next to a nerve and there's not a dentist around here that will pull (it) that takes a medical card like that. So you have to go to Burtonville. And I have no transportation.

I have a medical card, but you can't always go to a doctor you want to go to and certain hospitals.

Many of the respondents complain of the poor treatment they receive when they use the medical card:

I usually go to the emergency room because the doctors that take the medical card aren't worth going to anyway. They're so booked up that what's the use.

When you walk into a hospital and you don't have insurance, automatically you're labelled. I've had to force them to give him (her son) treatments in the emergency room. When we had insurance everything was hunky dory and they took care of you. Now we're forced to deal with the clinic for low income people. So you go in there and take what you get. The doctors aren't as good there and sometimes you may not get a doctor you may get a nurse practitioner, which I know more than a nurse practitioner.

A waitress talks about an experience where she feels she was treated badly by medical personnel due to having to use the medical card:

**Researcher:** Can you give me an example where you think you were treated badly?

**Waitress:** When I went into the OB clinic. I sat there and she told me I was supposed to go somewhere else and find here and she was real mean. And I said, "I told you I didn't know what I was doing." So, I went over there and they made me stand and wait until they got everybody else, even people that I was there before. So I came back and the lady said there was still a lot of people ahead of me. So I went to get something to eat because I'd been sitting there for a few hours already. And the people that hadn't been seen ;yet that's been there long before I had, so I went to get something to eat. And when I came back she started yelling at me. She said we usually get people that's an emergency before everybody else. And

I looked at her and I said, "You know, I work and I deserve to be treated a little better than that." 157

**Researcher:** What did she say?

**Waitress:** She shut up and everybody clapped.

Several of the research participants are indebted due to physical illnesses that they do not have the resources to pay. A bus aide states:

I'm still paying a lot of medical bills from when I was not on ADC. I needed them. I had kidney problems and I'm still paying on that and I have some dental bills.

Another woman whose son has "brittle bone disease" and no medical insurance states:

There's about \$25,000 in the credit bureau right now. He (her son) broke an arm, broke a leg, had his fingers shut in a door and fourteen stitches in the end of his fingers as thin as they are that's a lot. We can't keep up with everything. What the insurance company pays they get the check, but it doesn't cover it all. Some of it is 80 percent and some of it isn't. They wouldn't cover the cost of removing the cast. They covered the cost of putting it on, but they wouldn't cover the cost of taking it off.

And there are other problems. Certain specialties can only be found in the larger cities and require rural residents to drive long distances on a regular basis which is expensive.

When I have kidney problems I go to Columbus which is an 85 mile drive and it takes me one and a half hours to get there. I'm a chronic kidney stone patient.

Another respondent talks about the problem of having pre-existing conditions which a new insurance company will not pick up even if they could afford the premium:

We're defeated and there is no where to go. There's...you're up against a wall. And now try to take out a private policy is 300 some dollars a month and it won't cover a pre-existing condition.

### Housing

The majority of the working poor people interviewed did not own their homes. Most of the people lived in traditional two-story, white framed houses that were built 50-60 years ago. Others lived in mobile homes or small wood frame houses. A couple of the respondents lived in government subsidized apartments. Most prefer to live in free standing units in the community because they do not have to face the stigma associated with



government housing. However, some people would like to obtain government housing because it would save them money. Unfortunately, most of the respondents found the waiting list for government housing to be excessively long.

I've been paying full rent like anybody else...I signed up for HUD almost a year ago and I'm still waiting.

Some won't move into government housing units because of the perceived crime threat:

I could have lived in a subsidized unit like where I was before but there was a lot of drugs and violence but it just wasn't worth it for me and my daughter. Our neighbors were drug dealers.

There is a lack of low-income housing available at any price and in any form in most of the rural southeastern Ohio communities. The researcher attempted to move into one of several southeastern Ohio communities during the course of the study and was unable to locate any suitable housing at any price in three different counties. A note from the researcher's reflexive journal states:

There is a real lack of rental housing in the rural counties we have visited. No property for rent is advertised in the local papers and most is rented by word of mouth. A Realtor in one county told me that when a rental house does become available it goes fast. There just isn't any housing available at any price. I'm not sure the lack of affordable housing is an issue here. The problem is there isn't any housing at all!

A plant worker states:

I think houses are outrageous. There ain't enough housing. I know that. There isn't enough low-income housing and with low income housing you get low class people that causes trouble, drugs, ya know, people who steal. I don't know, it just...there's not enough houses.

Most of the respondents interviewed live in housing that "fits in" with the housing development around them. It may be a small brown, wood-frame house located on a shady street in a small town or a house trailer parked on a relative's property in the country to save money. They are in many ways invisible. While the external appearance of their homes may appear worn and it may need a coat of paint, they do not stand out as abnormal when compared to the homes around them.

It is inside the homes of the respondents where the sacrifices made to survive on a limited budget become visible. Some observational notes from the researcher's reflexive journal describe the inside of several of the respondents' homes:

If you should drive by their homes they look like your typical white frame house with a big 100 year old shade tree out front. But if you go inside you start to see the subtle indicators of poverty all around you. The worn couch which has long since lost its colorful felt pattern and now has only the cover over the foam remaining.

The rug is worn. The walls are painted and there are few pictures on the walls. None of the furniture matches and a rented refrigerator sits in the corner of the living room.

As I looked around the room I could see that the covers are almost completely worn off the couches and the foam is hanging out. The dining room chairs all have the plastic worn off of them and the cardboard is showing through. Later in the evening I sat in Barry's favorite stuffed rocking chair which doesn't rock straight but rather from side to side and feels like it is going to break off and fall over. Time and time again as I walk in these houses I am taken with the inability of these families to replace furniture, linen and clothing.

Bill and his family live in a very small trailer. He had to take another job in a non-union plant that pays less money because the plant he was working in closed down and moved south to pay lower wages and benefits to it's workers. Their trailer is very small for four people. The ceiling and walls have holes in them and there is little insulation which causes major problems in the winter with heating due to the high costs of fuel oil.

For some of the respondents there has been the long and difficult struggle of attempting to maintain the mortgage on homes they can no longer afford after losing good paying jobs in the mines or the mills. For example, Michael and Sharon have been married 17 years. They have lived their entire married lives in the small village of Coal Town. Michael is 37 years old and Sharon is 34. They have 4 children, three boys and one girl, ages 16, 13, 7 and 4. They live in a small, 3-bedroom home which is clean but plainly furnished. Two years ago they were a middle class family. Michael had earned \$36,100 by the month of October, when he was suddenly and without warning laid off from the coal mine where he had worked for the past 12 years. Last year, Sharon reports that they made \$9,000 to support a family of six. This is significantly lower than the official poverty

level of \$16,180. With only 4 years left on the house mortgage they were forced to refinance the house through FHA to prevent foreclosure. They now have a new 33-year, \$115 a month payment on a house they would have owned in 4 years. Several months after the initial interview with the researcher this family attempted to sell their home, but no one in this poor community could afford to buy their small, modest home. After 15 years of paying on the mortgage, they decided to turn the home over to the mortgage company and officially default as they could not afford to continue to pay the \$115 a month mortgage. The ironic turn to this story is that HUD will pay \$300 a month for a rental unit, but will not pay one cent to assist them in keeping their home.

### Transportation

The respondents generally drive old used cars. A typical car for most of the respondents in this study would be 10 years old, have 80,000 to 100,000 plus miles on it, and be a large sedan or truck that gets poor gas mileage and is in need of constant repair to maintain it in operating condition. The rural poor are affected the most by increased gasoline prices because of the long distances they must drive to get back and forth to work or school and because most of them can only afford the large, older model cars that are "gas hogs." It is not unusual for people in rural southeastern Ohio to drive between 60 and 100 miles a day to and from work. Due to a lack of credit most are forced to purchase cars with cash. Breakdowns are common and most repairs are made by themselves or friends to control the expenses of maintaining an old automobile. To the rural poor who live in the country a car is their life line. It provides them with the transportation they need to go to work and the store to buy food and clothing. It is a vital necessity for these people. It is not a luxury. A litter control supervisor states:

It makes me mad the government in today's age does not allow for you to have a car payment and things like this (to obtain welfare assistance) you know. A few years ago a car might not have been a necessity but in today's world cars are a necessity, just like a house is.

Others respondents who are fortunate enough to live in the small towns and villages and near enough to work to either walk or hitch a ride with someone don't even own cars. In an interview with a plant worker:

**Researcher:** What kind of car do you have?

**Plant worker:** I don't.

**Researcher:** How do you get to work?

**Plant worker:** Friends.

**Researcher:** How long has it been since you owned a car?

**Plant worker:** Uh, it's been about a year. That was a clunker and I had to get rid of it. But as far as car-wise and getting a dependable car, I can hang that up. You might as well forget it.

**Researcher:** How far do you walk for groceries?

**Plant worker:** We walk out there and take a cab back. It runs us 5 bucks for the cab. The bus system is ok but it only runs till 7 on weekdays, on the weekends till 5 p.m. and on Sunday, they don't run at all.

In a conversation with a divorced, single parent mother who works in a factory she talks about her transportation problems:

**Researcher:** How old were you when you got your driver's license?

**Factory worker:** Thirty-nine. Well, I didn't need one when we were married and then when I got a divorce I didn't have the money to get a car.

**Researcher:** How did you get to work?

**Factory worker:** Friends. The people who worked...two ladies that worked there would pick me up and then, you know, if they had other things to do in the evenings when we got done with work I'd ask anybody.

**Factory worker's daughter:** A lot of times you walked too!

**Factory worker:** Sometimes I walked 2-3 miles.

For most of the respondents there were no vacations to break up the tedium of their lives.

We haven't taken a vacation in so long I couldn't tell you when. We take the kids to the pool now and then for recreation. It cost a buck to get in. Go to ball games in the park, doesn't cost anything.

We have been married 17 years and we've never gone away on vacation.

My vacations are when I was in the hospital with my kids for a few days.

I've got a vacation next week and I'm spendin' it home.

Oh, no vacations. There just isn't any money. Maybe go to the amusement park for the day, that kind of thing. But there's no, uh, no we've never, no one in my family ever has, especially since the divorce.

It's been at least 10 years since we've been on a vacation. The boys have been wantin' to go to the ocean ever since they were old enough to walk and we have never been able to get them there yet. We keep sayin' next year, next year, but it hasn't happened yet, so I don't know.

I've been at my job for 11 years and I haven't taken a vacation since. I'm eligible for a vacation the second week of July and I can't take it. So nothing's different from any other year. I work right through em.

Recreation is primarily restricted by a lack of funds and a shortage of time. People adapt and develop cheaper, simpler forms of leisure pursuits.

We put the grill out on the porch and cook out there and maybe we take a ride and get the kids an ice cream cone. And now since we got a VCR, we get the kids a movie. By the time you pay for mom and dad and the two kids and popcorn and the whole nine yards, you've got 25 dollars wrapped up in going to the movies. So now we go rent the kids a movie. There's not a lot we can do, recreation is very limited.

Other than the little holidays now and then we just like to fix a covered dish and go to a family's house or a friend's house.

When you've only got one car, I've got to make sure that everybody gets where they're goin'. So really there's no time for recreation by the time he mows the yard in the evenings after working all day. Or I baby-sit to help out, ya know, or we run the paper route. So there's not much recreational time as far as that. When we do have a few minutes, we sit and do nothing because we like relaxing.

For recreation we cook out on the grill. We work all the time.

Actually last year we took a day and big deal, spent about 25 dollars and went on a picnic with the kids, you know. I don't even have that this year.

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There are no exotic or traditional week long vacations to a neighboring state, let alone another region of the country. They attend their children's track meets, softball and football games. They go fishing, volunteer as coaches of their children's athletic teams and with the volunteer fire department. They attend church functions or local concerts. Some people spend large amounts of time watching television. But as one office manager said to the researcher, "Most of the time we just make our own entertainment at home." A plant worker summarizes what recreation is for him by saying, "surviving. That's the biggest hobby we got."

### Needs

Only a few respondents said that they needed money. Most were more interested in purchasing a home, a decent car (both of which require money), or getting a better job. More minor concerns were the need for health insurance, furniture, appliances, clothes and other basic necessities.

Housing is a crucial need for many of the respondents:

The only needs we need right now is just more room. If we had a house and could afford to pay it and keep the insurance up on it we wouldn't need nothin' else.

My needs are to have a home of our own.

I want a nice home. I'm not talking about a rich mans but something that we're all satisfied with. Something that you don't gotta live in and sit at the table and eat your food and watch a roach run up the wall. I don't want to worry about little things like that.

I'd like to have a house, not worry about rent.

Automobiles are a constant source of concern for the respondents. Especially in a rural area where people have to travel long distances to shop, work and attend school.

Decent vehicle would be the first thing we need.

A decent car. I don't have to worry about it breakin' down. No spare and all that stuff.

So I think I want a nice looking car. It may not be a new car but it runs good.

A car. If I had transportation, a car, a truck, a motorcycle...like now, I could do anything.

I'd like to have a dependable car. I would like to have a car that I could go and do what I wanted to do. I can't think of anything I really want.

I would like a new vehicle. My Blazers got a 145,000 miles on it.

They talk about needing security and stability in their jobs, finances and living arrangements:

I need a job with security. I'd like a job where you get benefits, you get time off. Sort of like a government job.

A better job. A job where I could work everyday and know that there is money comin' in during the week. And not do what I do. You've got to wait for the phone to ring and wonder if you're going to get a job. I got work these two days and you know, I made 300 dollars, but I might not work for another week. You know, I don't want to be rich. I just want a steady job where I've got enough so my kids can have it, and my wife. I want to live comfortable. I don't want a Cadillac.

I need to feel financially secure. I mean my husband can't understand why I signed the lease here for a year and I said because I needed to feel secure. We've been together almost 5 years and we've moved at least 12 times in five years.

We'd like to put a lot in the bank and buy a house. Which is really the only thing we want to do is buy a house and we can't do it. We want our own house. We get tired of movin' here and there to here all the time when you're renting.

Finally, an important need for the respondents that should not be overlooked is the need for medical insurance coverage. They state:

Probably medical benefits for the kids and the things they need for school and things like that.

Good medical coverage at a price we can afford.

### Goals

In most cases, the goals of the respondents were practical and consistent with the American dream. They seek jobs that are more rewarding psychologically and financially. They want to own homes, improve their education, develop intimate relationships with significant others, and establish some stability in their lives.

Only one of the respondents had a goal of becoming rich. The majority of the respondents are looking for jobs that pay a modest wage that can enable them to obtain some stability in their lives. A plant worker states:

I'm not saying to make everybody rich, but just live fairly well. Enough to where they could save a pocket of money in the bank and have emergency money in the house. Just like at. Just so everyone could live in a nice house, have the necessities that they need, you know. I don't want to be rich. If I went out and hit a million bucks off the lottery, I'm not saying I wouldn't be happy, but it's not my dream. The only thing that my dream is just to live fairly well. Just have the things I wanta have and need.

Most of the respondents realize that the days of the big paying jobs are over:

Just an average payin' job is all that I would ask for, it doesn't have to be high payin'. I think the days of high wages are gone. Big payin' jobs are on their way out anyway. The real big paying jobs for labor are on their way out.

Some people are looking for jobs that they can enjoy:

My biggest needs in life. Um, far as jobs and money go...I just want to do something. I'm not looking to get rich. I just want to be happy and do something that I enjoy and something that I won't hate on Monday morning.

Others are looking for another job that pays better or a second job to help them pay off their accumulation of debts:

For the next year I'm lookin' or figuerin next to be a little better off financially, you know, hopin' that this job comes through.

I'd like within the next year to get a better job. A job with benefits, you know.



Oh boy. I'm hoping that maybe I'll be able to find a decent job. I'd like to find another job to help me get over for right now, ya know. Get me through. Get me caught up. Then after that I don't know...just getting caught up.

Many of the respondents dream of a nice house they can call home:

My goal is to have a nice home that's ours and to fill it with furniture and to be able to live comfortable...to have peace of mind.

Hopefully, to get a HUD house and at least not have to worry one month to the next how I'm gonna pay my rent. I'd like to be able to live comfortably. Hopefully, to get a job after I have my baby.

Git a house within the next year.

Five years from now I would like to have been working at a good job and have money saved up and be living in a house.

Work everyday, have a good job, get a veteran's loan, stop paying rent, have my own house and that way I could say it was my house.

I really don't have any goals. The main one is to keep the house so we have a place to live and keep the bills paid.

A small number of the research participants want to go to school and obtain an education.

Finish college. That might take several years. Make sure my daughter gets a decent education.

I'd like to finish school in trucking.

To go to school. I could probably do it in five quarters if I really put my nose to the grindstone and went (complete her college degree).

Just to find me a steady job and have me a teaching degree by then and be doing something. Be able to teach and work with the kids and just like we said, being comfortable like we were.

Go back to school and get my degree in banking and finance.

There is also a concern about their children getting advanced education.

We worry about our son graduating and getting a good job. Maybe putting him through a vocational school to further his education.

Well, my daughter's going to be graduating and I have to save some money.

I want to see my daughter through school.

Several of the single parent mothers expressed an interest in establishing an intimate relationship with a significant other in their lives:

I would like to be happily married with a nice family. Comfortable. I would like to be a housewife. Be able to bake pies and cakes for my kids and be the mother that I am supposed to be. I would like to a, ya know, be a parent teacher. Little things like that.

I'd like to find a nice man and marry him and be able to settle down and be happy again.

I don't particularly want to spend the rest of my life alone. That's not my goal and I have a lot of love to give and share and I'm sure it will happen eventually.

Finally, the poor have often been criticized as being self-centered, present-time oriented and for failing to set long term goals. It is believed by some who follow the culture of poverty model that these personality traits are what causes the poverty of the rural poor. However, these quotes indicate that the working poor people's focus on the here and now and their unwillingness to set long term goals is reflective of a need to survive. It is a practical psychological survival mechanism that enables them to maintain a positive attitude towards life's hardships. It is a pragmatic view of the world that is forced upon them by their lack of financial resources and opportunity in the work world.

I don't even think that far ahead. I take one day at a time. I've learned to take one day at a time, ya know. I have to. Because if somethin' comes up ya know tomorrow I'll check into it. If not, well, why worry about it. Why get yourself built up over somethin' that just brings you down. It just don't work out. You get discouraged, ya know, so what's the use? I don't like feelin' like that. I just take one day at a time.

I don't have none. I don't have no goals whatsoever. My goals are to keep goin' on. That's it. I don't have...I don't plan nothin' ahead. I'd like to but everytime I do I run into somethin'. So I don't plan I just go day to day, but when I see that I can go ahead and plan it that day to where nothin' else is goin' to bump in then I just go ahead and do it. Ya know, I can't say well kids we're going to Kennywood next week and stuff like that. Dad's gonna take a day off. We'll wait to plan nothin' for the kids or nothin'. When I feel and stuff like that that we can go--that day. No gettin' the kids hopes up high, or your self, you just go ahead and do it. Nothin' ever turns out the way you planned.

I don't know you don't know what is going to happen from day to day and you know like, when I do plan on working over time that's when the time cuts out and that's when we went down to four days. So you know you can't depend on anything so that's probably why I don't set any long term goals. 168

No, I don't look that far down the road to be honest. Because I did that in my past and it was devastating so now I shy away from that.

### Summary

Document analysis reflects a community that has historically suffered enormous poverty. This historical pattern of high unemployment, low wage labor and poverty conditions continues today. Newspaper and magazine articles reflect a state of hopelessness and helplessness. Newspaper editors, community developers, corporate executives and local citizens write powerful pieces of prose crying out for help and assistance, yet their calls appear to fall on deaf ears and nagging questions remain: Is this problem bigger than all of us? Do we have the technology and know how to change things? If so, why haven't we done it? A smaller number of articles reflect the theme of hope which is exemplified by a small, but steady trickle of ideas that reflect some modest attempts to change laws to support economic growth in the community. Videos have been produced to help "sell" the community to corporations to promote economic development in the region, while the lumber industry is working to market its products overseas. Efforts have been made at establishing a tourist industry and a minor welfare reform movement has evolved as some local political leaders recognize the need to improve the support provided to people who attempt to work in low-wage positions.

The culture of working poor people revolves around the importance of the children, family, friends, the church and the community, mostly in that order. They seek safety, security and identity for themselves and their families within the context of the small towns, villages and countryside communities where they live. Religion and a strong faith in God helps them make it through the hard times. Work is central to their sense of being. It is better to work a low-wage, marginal, part-time position than do no work at all.

While many of the respondents do not define themselves as poor, others do accept this term as descriptive of their condition. But many still focus on the fact that other people who are homeless or on welfare are "worse off" than themselves in an effort to defend the institution and viability of low-income labor and work. The respondents are ambivalent about the rich, but clearly angry and hostile towards the people on welfare whom they believe are taking advantage of the system. They feel that people on welfare have lost the motivation to work and are being rewarded to do nothing. They believe that these people earn more money on welfare than they do working and are resentful and angry at the welfare system for not restricting the benefits available for people "who don't try to work," and for not expanding the eligibility guidelines to provide low-income, working people with greater support so they and their families can afford to work. They are embarrassed when circumstances require them to accept welfare assistance of any kind, be it AFDC, food stamps, government housing, or low income school lunches.

The respondents believe that the government and politicians don't understand their condition nor care about rectifying it. They view politicians as "crooks" who are only in office for themselves, not because they want to help others. And while some have given up on voting, others still believe in the importance and civic responsibility of each and every person to vote and express their opinion on the issues, particularly the local school levys and bond issues where they believe their vote still has meaning. Most admit that they don't believe their vote has much impact on the state and federal levels of government and they feel alienated from their representatives.

Health care is a major issue for the respondents. Health care insurance has become for many of the working poor people too expensive or too limited in its coverage to protect them from financial ruin. There are calls for national health care insurance or some alternative that insures that everyone has adequate medical coverage. Unfortunately, since no system exists at present to provide them with these services many of the respondents do

without when it comes to medical and dental care, placing many of them at risk for suffering a chronic or disabling illness due to a lack of regular preventive health care.

Some of the respondents have been able to maintain modest homes or trailers that they own, but many more do not, however, this does not keep them from dreaming of a day when they will own their own homes.

Their automobiles are old and worn, but they are as necessary as the air they breathe, for without transportation many working poor people would be imprisoned within their immediate communities. There are few alternatives for those who live in the country and small towns because of a lack of public transportation system.

Recreation is limited. There are no vacations. For some there have never been any vacations. The most one can hope for is to take a day trip to an amusement park or to go fishing and even then they threaten the ability to pay next months bills. So most of the respondents settle for down home entertainment such as TV, VCR movies, swimming, playing softball, attending local high school events, cooking out and spending time with family.

For most of the respondents they express the need for homes, a decent car and a better job. They also need medical insurance, furniture, appliances, clothes and other basic necessities. Their goals are simple and straightforward. They seek jobs that are rewarding psychologically and financially and they want to own homes, obtain an education for them and their children, have intimate relationships with significant others, and establish some stability in their lives.

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

In chapters four and five, a descriptive analysis of these data were conducted to describe the condition of poverty for rural working poor people. The semi-structured questions of the interview guide, which were derived from the pilot study, were the basic structure around which this analysis and subsequent categories and themes were built. In this chapter the researcher will go beyond the description of the respondents' situation, and into the realm of interpretation of the data to answer the question: What does this all mean?

Patton (1990) defines data interpretation as follows:

Interpretation, by definition, involves going beyond the descriptive data. Interpretation means attaching significance to what was found, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, building linkages, attaching meanings, imposing order, and dealing with rival explanations, disconfirming cases, and data irregularities as part of testing the viability of an interpretation. All of this is expected--and appropriate--as long as the researcher owns the interpretation and makes clear the difference between description and interpretation. (p.423)

In this discussion the researcher will triangulate the findings of this study with the other major poverty theories to integrate them into a collective whole that more closely approximates and explains the social reality of rural working poor people in southeastern Ohio. Additionally, as the researcher analyzed the data, the ecological model (Germain, 1991) and the dual perspective (Chestang, 1976; Norton, 1978) emerged as useful tools for clarifying the nature of rural poverty and how rural working poor people respond to it. Subsequently, these perspectives will be incorporated into the grounded theory.

The following is the researcher's interpretation of these data and the subsequent development of a grounded theory that seeks to explain the causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, action/interaction strategies and consequences for rural working poor people who live under the constant stress of poverty that forces the respondents to utilize the coping mechanism of adaptation to survive.

### Ecological Perspective

Social work has historically shown concern for the person, the environment and the interaction which occurs between the two forces. The ecological perspective is based on the science of ecology which studies the relationship between organisms and their environments and is a useful perspective from which different theories can be integrated (Germain, 1991). This perspective is concerned with "the degree of fit between people's rights, needs, capacities, and goals on the one hand and the quality and properties of social and physical environments on the other..." (Germain and Gitterman, 1987, p.489). It views people as being active agents who are capable of acting on their environment based on past experience and their perception of future opportunities (Germain, 1979). Germain (1980) states that the purpose of social work practice using this model is "to strengthen the adaptive capacities of people and to influence their environments so that transactions are more adaptive" (p. 10).

The central concept of the ecological perspective is adaptation. Germain (1991) has argued that this does not suggest a situation where the individual is always adjusting to the environment in a series of "passive accommodations to the environment of the status quo" (p.17), but rather adaptation must, and can occur at both the individual and the macro systems level of the environment as the two forces interact with one another. Thus, individuals continually adapt to their environment and the environment to them in a circular fashion. Consequently, the goal for all human beings is to obtain the best possible person:environment fit where both parties' needs are satisfactorily met.

According to Germain (1991), a poor person:environment fit occurs when a dominant group in society abuses their political and economical power which creates social pollutions such as poverty, unemployment, inflation, poor health care and inadequate housing. Technological pollutions such as unreclaimed strip mining lands or air pollution caused by the burning of high sulfur coal in power plants may also occur.

Pinderhughes (1983) has written about the need for people to have some control over their life to maintain a sense of mental health. She defines power as, "the capacity to influence the forces which affect one's life space for one's own benefit" and powerlessness as "the incapacity to exert such influence" (p. 332). The ecological perspective supports interaction between the person and the environment. This promotes a type of reciprocal relationship in which both forces make continual adaptations to one another, so that individuals as well as systems can influence one another for their mutual benefit. If the environment is not willing to adapt to the needs of individuals, a poor person:environment fit occurs in which people begin to experience a vicious cycle of powerlessness.

Pinderhughes (1983) states:

...victims of poverty and oppression are caught up in a cycle of powerlessness in which the failure of the larger social system to provide needed resources operates in a circular manner. It entraps the victims and sets in motion a malignant process, for the failure of the larger system to provide necessary support creates powerlessness in communities. And the more powerless a community due to the denial of resources and nutritive supplies, the more the families are hindered from meeting the needs of their members and from organizing to improve the community so that it can provide them with some support. And the more powerless the family in efforts to protect its members from the stress of community failure and in efforts to change its destructiveness, the more are the individual members blocked in attempts to acquire skills, develop self-esteem, and strengthen the family. (p. 332)

A positive person:environment fit is characterized by the four concepts of relatedness, competence, self-direction and self-esteem (Germain, 1991). Human relatedness is essential for optimal health. People need to have attachment to significant others such as family and friends who provide them with the necessary social support to protect them from psychosocial stressors and to assist them in coping with life's problems.



Competence is developed over the life course by individuals when they experience situations and develop the necessary skills to successfully master and influence their social and physical environment. Self-direction refers to the ability of an individual to maintain a certain degree of autonomy over internal and external forces. It also refers to the individuals acceptance of the responsibility to make decisions and act upon one's life world to improve the well-being of one's family and community. Finally, self-esteem "refers to positive feelings about oneself acquired through the experiences of relatedness, competence and self-direction across the life course" (Germain, 1991, p. 26).

Germain (1991) states that relatedness is the first, and most important of the four attributes and their contribution to the positive person:environment fit. She describes three principles that guide the understanding of these attributes: 1) they are products of person:environment relationships; 2) they are interdependent on one another and contribute to the development of each other; and 3) they are believed by Germain to be free of cultural bias.

There are two other ecological concepts that are useful for understanding poverty. Niche is a concept that refers to an individual's status in the community. Habitat consists of the physical setting where individuals live, i.e. rural or urban, apartment or house. It also consists of the social setting which is composed of the family, work and religious life of the individual within that community. Habitats can play a crucial role in the ability of individuals to function in a healthy manner. An inadequate habitat can result in a poor person:environment fit that can lead to feelings of depression, anger, isolation and powerlessness (Germain and Gitterman, 1987). Germain (1979) talks about the importance of the role of habitat in providing individuals with a sense of identity:

Both the natural and built worlds are important components of a sense of identity. Many persons, for example, have a deeply rooted sense of place, and their geographic origins are part of their sense of self. Others feel a kinship with the world of nature that is part of their sense of identity. (p. 14)

The dual perspective may be conceived of as the following (Norton, 1978):

...the conscious and systematic process of perceiving, understanding, and comparing simultaneously the values, attitudes, and behavior of the larger societal system with those of the client's immediate family and community system. (p.3)

Every person is a part of two environments. There is the individual's immediate physical and social environment that Chestang (1976) calls the nurturing environment. The nurturing environment consists of family, friends, neighbors and the church in the local community of the individual. This system provides a person with the necessary psychological and emotional support system. Here is where the individual experiences intimacy with others and a sense of identity. This environment contains the culture of the individual that influences their way of thinking, feeling and behaving in relationship to the world around them.

The other environment is the larger society which Chestang (1976) refers to as the sustaining environment. The sustaining environment is part of the dominant culture of society which holds the economic resources, political power and provides the goods and services to members of society. This environment consists of the economic, political, and educational community that provides people with their physical needs such as safety and security. This system also provides people with status and power.

Norton (1978) has applied Mead's concept of the generalized other to Chestang's dual environments. She states that Mead "defined the generalized other as taking on the attitude of the wider society in regard to oneself. In this way he learns how to become an object to oneself, to have an identity, to know oneself through role taking and from reflection of others" (p.4). Norton cautions that minority people can develop a negative self-concept if they accept the attitude of the generalized other of the sustaining environment which may devalue people of race, color or disadvantage. She states that minority people attain a positive self-concept through an alternative generalized other that is embedded in the nurturing environment. This ensures that disadvantaged people can maintain their self-

esteem through the attitude and love of family and friends who can instill a positive sense of self in them. This immediate generalized other can compensate for the negative image of the major generalized other that stems from the larger dominant society.

The utility of this perspective is that it forces social workers "to view the clients' responses in the context of their sociocultural circumstances" (Norton, 1978, p.3). It also attempts to explain the impact of microenvironmental factors such as family, and the macroenvironmental factors such as social structure, on each other and the individual as they interact with one another (Chestang, 1976). Chestang (1976) has written about the dilemma that Blacks face in the course "of living in two worlds and the duality that develops within the personality structure of an individual when his membership in a certain group prohibits the fusion of his own identity with the larger world around him" (p. 59). Likewise, working poor people in Appalachia are dependent on the larger society for their survival, but lacking the opportunity to succeed, they must make adaptations to the larger societal system which controls the functions of their survival.

Germain's conceptualization of person:environment may need to be reconceptualized as a person within an immediate environment which exists within a larger societal environment, i.e. person: immediate (nurturing) environment: societal (sustaining) environment. Only in this way can the complex interactions of rural working poor people be understood within the sociocultural context of their nurturing and sustaining environment, and the interaction that occurs between, and within these two very different worlds.

### Critique of Poverty Theories

All of the theoretical models developed in the past explain poverty in some situations. But each of them individually lacks sufficient depth to accurately portray the multiple realities of rural poverty. They fail to describe the problem of poverty in a more contextual fashion accounting for the multiple realities of poor people and the environments

that they must encounter in their lives. The conflict, critical and opportunity theories all focus primarily on the macro forces of the social structure in attempting to explain poverty. The structural functional and culture of poverty theories focus primarily on the purported individual causes of poverty. None of these theories attempts to integrate the micro and macro causes of poverty. They all ignore the person in environment transactions that are at the center of social work philosophy.

In this study, the respondents' attitudes, values and behavior within the context of their environment appear to be explained well by structural functional theory. These respondents still share the values and norms of the larger society that is epitomized by the middle class. They are well aware of the local elite in their rural communities who hold the power, be it bankers, law enforcement officers, or local business and political leaders. This local elite controls much of what goes on in these small communities and there is a certain acceptance of their power and influence over the working poor people's lives. Working poor people are not terribly concerned with the conflict some may have over the values within society. They believe strongly in the traditional values of hard work, individualism and independence. Stability and security is what they most desire. They seek equilibrium in their lives, family and local rural communities. They work hard to contribute to the functioning of the system and pay taxes to support it. For the respondents, poverty does function to reinforce the low wage labor pool (Gans, 1972). The working poor will work any job to avoid the stigma of welfare. They do the dirty work that others will not do. As one saw mill worker told this researcher, "We do the hardest work for the lowest pay."

There can be little doubt that these respondents cannot attain the goals of the larger sustaining system by the means made available to them. In general, working poor people adhere to the traditional belief that individuals who work hard can earn a good living. Though some recognize that this era may be coming to an end, the hope persists that the economy will improve and that once again they will be able to reap the rewards of their

labor. In the meantime, most of the respondents have been forced to limit their goals and aspirations in order to maintain what little self-esteem they have left as they adapt to the condition of poverty. If the economy does not improve, it will be interesting to see how long these people can maintain themselves in this ritualistic role. Will an evolutionary process occur where the working poor people will surrender to this constant lack of opportunity and retreat to a more accommodating role? It can be hypothesized that this is what has happened to people who exist on welfare generation after generation. The "total welfare people" have apparently developed a new set of goals which revolve around survival and the utilization of welfare as the means to attain these goals. They are functioning in the role of retreatism. They do not seek to attain the middle class dream through hard work, for they have lost hope and do not believe it is an achievable dream. Finally, the role of rebellion was not visible to this researcher during the course of this study. There was no evidence of any active rebellion challenging the authority of the sustaining environment or its representatives.

Most of the respondents in this study exhibit the personality traits of the culture of poverty model. However, it is important to recognize that these traits do not appear to be the cause of their poverty. They are psychological adaptations that enable them to endure the condition of poverty despite working a job. The culture of poverty theory is descriptive of poor people's personality traits, but it does not explain these respondents' reasons for being poor. It is not their values and beliefs about the world that cause them to be stricken with poverty. They do not lack the ambition to pull themselves out of this state. Structural unemployment, a depressed economy, lack of work skills and education, divorce and discrimination are the reasons why they are poor. It should be emphasized that there is a marked difference between having no work skills and not having the motivation to acquire the necessary skills to obtain suitable employment. While a few of the respondents in this study admitted a lack of motivation to pursue skill development, the majority were highly motivated to improve themselves and their socioeconomic position if given the

opportunity to do so. To focus on programs that seek to change the individuals' values will not improve their chances of obtaining suitable employment in southeastern Ohio.

Opportunity theory explains the shortage of quality jobs that provide people with enough income to adequately care for them and their families. Wage scales and benefit packages are falling at a time when inflation is increasing the cost of everything from food to homes. The changing work place has made many people's work skills obsolete requiring the retraining of many thousands of older workers. The respondents have little formal education which hurts their chances of obtaining suitable employment. There is serious discrimination in the work place based on age, sex, race and who you know or don't know. This theory recognizes that upgrading human capital alone will not eradicate poverty. In these Appalachian counties, many people with college degrees encounter frequent periods of unemployment and low wage work because there are not enough quality jobs available. This theory is the most accurate reflection of the causes of poverty for the working poor people of southeastern Ohio. Nevertheless, poverty has many dimensions such as the context in which it occurs, the intervention strategies people use to combat its effects, and the consequences of poverty for poor people. Opportunity theory ignores these aspects of the poverty condition.

At first glance, the basic tenets of conflict theory do not appear relevant to this study. Social change (of a progressive nature) is slow to occur in southeastern Ohio. Shannon's (1943) criticisms of the region are still as relevant today as they were 50 years ago. He states:

The basic problem of Southeastern Ohio is that its people have been deprived of access to the cultural and economic opportunities ordinarily thought of as available to Americans. Through circumstances beyond their individual or collective control, the conditions peculiar to an economically depressed area have frustrated them in the right to work steadily at wages high enough to maintain a healthful and decent level of living. (p. 48)

Many of the respondents still believe that they are a member of the middle class, particularly those who are a part of the abandoned group of working poor people. They

continue to identify with the middle class rather than the lower class with whom they may have more in common. These respondents are in search of stability, not change for change's sake. They do not want to radically change the system. They want to work within the system to make it more responsive to their needs and modify it to improve their opportunity to succeed and achieve its goals. Conflict and dissensus are seldom evident as the respondents follow the rules of the dominant society and seek to maintain the current social, economic and political order. In fact, with the recent Republican administrations focus on reducing the power of unions, there is even less evidence of any conflict in this region now that the United Mine Workers and other unions have become increasingly more dependent on the companies for their continued existence, and have become quite powerless. Thus, the respondents do not contribute to the disintegration of the system. Though some people recognize the inherent inequalities and injustices of the system, they are not willing and/or capable of doing anything about them.

The respondents do not suffer normlessness as they still hold to the cultural means to attain the goals of the sustaining system. They are not isolated or detached from the sustaining system's goals. They are very much committed to these goals and frustrated by their inability to attain them. While the respondents may be self-estranged from the sustaining system, they appear to have compensated for this problem by activating a nurturing system that is especially prominent and powerful in their lives. Here, family, friends, church and the community act as a buffer to prevent the respondents from bearing the full force of poverty and oppression. This nurturing environment replaces the goals of material success achieved through competitiveness with more spiritual and caring goals attained through cooperativeness with others.

Nevertheless, despite this lack of observable discord, conflict theory does have much to tell us about why people are poor and why they don't do more about their situation. Power, or in the case of poor people powerlessness, is the the real core of conflict theory (Duke, 1976). The concepts of powerlessness and inequality have great

relevance for understanding why people are poor in southeastern Ohio. Today's poverty, in places like rural southeastern Ohio, is reflected in a stratified system where people suffer from economic deprivation that is relative in nature and better analyzed from the perspective of stratification. According to Miller and Roby (1970), "Poverty is not only a condition of economic insufficiency; it is also social and political exclusion" (p.12). These authors believe that poor people must have the opportunity to experience self-respect, obtain an education, achieve social mobility and participate in political decision-making; in addition to acquiring minimum levels of income, goods and services. The working poor people of southeastern Ohio are increasingly experiencing a wider gap between themselves and the members of the larger society. Their chances of fulfilling these six dimensions of well-being continue to shrink and tax their already limited resources and adaptational mechanisms.

A major question arises: If working poor people are so oppressed, why do they continue to acquiesce to the desires and wants of the sustaining environment? Why is there no evidence of any organized protest? Gaventa (1980) believes that the main reason why poor people don't revolt is because they "are ideologically and culturally tied to the prevailing system of power" (pp. 38-39). This phenomena was readily observed in this study and is not unlike the observation that would be made by a structural functional theorist. Gaventa's (1980) analysis of power in an Appalachian Valley in Tennessee gets to the heart of the problem. He states:

In situations of inequality, the political response of the deprived may be seen as a function of power relationships. Power works to develop and maintain the quiescence of the powerless...Patterns of power and powerlessness can keep issues from arising, grievances from being voiced, and interests from being recognized.

Consequently, Dahrendorf's (1959) belief that order and conflict theory co-exist seems particularly relevant and important for understanding rural poverty. Despite this lack of opportunity, the majority of working poor people appear to continue to believe in the values and beliefs of the system with little thought of rebellion. However, for those



few who may consider an act of resistance there is a strong set of controlling forces that can be activated by the local elite in rural communities to maintain conformity to the values of the majority. Anyone who would challenge the sustaining environment, would at the same time be questioning the values and the beliefs of their nurturing environment, which overlap and are closely related to those of the sustaining environment in the case of working poor people. Consequently, working poor people are too embedded within the sustaining environment to challenge the inequities of the system and as long as they remain this way it would appear that no active form of resistance will occur. Only when a poor person's culture becomes more separate and different from the values and beliefs of the sustaining environment, is there a likelihood that a revolution could occur that would result in any substantive change in the way the system is constructed. And for this to occur, one must take great risks, because they seriously jeopardize the support of the nurturing environment which will in all probability be withdrawn from any person who would attempt to operate outside the mainstream of the rural community in which they live. The only way this process can occur is for a large enough group of people to become identified with a cause to build a new nurturing environment that is capable of withstanding the oppressive tactics that will be employed by the old nurturing environment and the sustaining environment to bring them back into the fold.

Critical theory explains all social problems such as poverty as being caused by inequitable social structures. While the argument that poverty is caused primarily by structural forces rather than individual deficiencies is credible in many ways, the promotion of a personal or social revolution on the part of working poor people to gain greater equality is highly unlikely. These people believe in the current system. At the same time, they are unorganized, widely dispersed throughout a 29-county area, and limited in their resources and power. To them, individual or collective anarchy would not be an acceptable means to obtain the goals of the larger society. And while some critical theorists may argue that these people suffer from a false consciousness, this researcher would argue that what

they see is not necessarily false. It is a pragmatic view of the world developed over time to assist them in coping with the tremendous stress of poverty and its attending conditions. It is somewhat condescending to think that this researcher knows better the pain and suffering the working poor people encounter in their daily lives. It is important that researchers be careful not to contradict or redefine what respondents have to say because it is their truth. This is not to say that the respondent's truth is the only truth, but it is their truth which provides them with meaning and it is this meaning that their actions are based upon.

Nevertheless, critical inquiry can be dangerous for the respondents. Social workers do have the tools to enlighten poor people about their situation. However, once enlightened where does the process lead? To empower the poor with information, tactics and strategies can lead to serious risks for the respondents. If these people confront the local elite in their communities and work to bring about social change too quickly or incompletely, it is they who will suffer the full brunt of this revolution's failure. The researcher will then go on to another project and the respondents may find themselves not only alienated from the sustaining environment, but also the nurturing environment. Without this environment as support these people might very well cease to exist. These are serious issues that are often ignored when using critical theory to understand the poor and their quest for emancipation from coercion and oppression. This theory leaves little room for compromise and adaptation on the part of poor individuals or the environments that surround them.

### Grounded Theory of Rural Poverty

To develop a grounded theory derived from the data that explains the situation of the rural working poor people in southeastern Ohio, the researcher used an analytic model developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). This model allowed the researcher to systematically link data in complex ways and to incorporate and integrate those parts of the

various theories into a more comprehensive whole. The model consisted of the following components:

- A) Causal Conditions>
- B) Phenomenon (or central concept) >
- C) Context >
- D) Intervening Conditions >
- E) Action/Interaction Strategies > and
- F) Consequences.

#### Causal Conditions

The causal conditions were the events which led to the development of poverty and the need for adaptation on the part of the working poor. It should be recognized that these are hypothesized relationships that are grounded in observational data that were inductively analyzed. Consequently, these research methods were not meant to test causal relationships which are usually confirmed or disconfirmed with the use of more quantitative, deductive methods which test hypotheses based on previously developed theory.

From the respondents' perspective the primary cause of their poverty was the lack of opportunity. In other words, there were not enough jobs available that paid enough money or provided the respondents with sufficient hours to earn an adequate living. Poverty is caused by other situational factors such as inadequate education and work skills and/or discrimination in the work place. This was especially true for both the abandoned and the neglected groups of working poor people. For the deserted group, their poverty was caused by divorce, but the lack of opportunity became a barrier to obtaining adequate employment after the divorce. There were a few respondents who believed that they were poor primarily because of personal deficiencies. Some admitted to being unmotivated to seek better employment, had not taken advantage of educational opportunities when they were younger, or were unable to work with other people because of personal problems. However, the overwhelming majority of the respondents believed that poverty was caused

by a lack of opportunity. The culture of poverty was not a useful theory for explaining why working people were poor.

### Central Concept

The central phenomena around which these data revolved was rural poverty. All the actions of the respondents were directed at managing or adapting to it. For the purposes of this study, a person was considered poor if they earned less income (based on family size), than the Federal Poverty Index guidelines developed by the government. However, a definitive, absolute definition such as this does not capture the complexities of rural poverty and all its consequences for people. Poverty is more than a numerical formula. It is composed of social deprivation, political powerlessness, psychological and physical deterioration, in addition to economic problems. It equates lack of social status and ability to influence one's environment. It is frequently characterized by limited access to an adequate education and making do with inferior goods and services in the solving of life's daily problems. In sum, it means not having the social, political, educational and economic opportunities that non-poor people have in their lives.

### Context

The context is the set of conditions within which the respondents have to live and act to improve their situation. Working poor people are forced to function within the constraints and requirements of the larger sustaining system. All their actions are judged and compared to the goals of the larger system.

This sustaining environment ( a dubious title which this environment increasingly fails to live up to), has not been kind to them. For the abandoned, the corporations came to southeastern Ohio, extracted the major resources out of the area such as timber and coal, and abruptly left when these resources were gone. There was little corporate responsibility, care or concern shown for the plight of these employees once the natural

resources were exhausted. Many of these respondents suffered drastic reductions in their earnings. This caused major financial hardships for them and their families. For the neglected, the larger system has failed to establish education and training programs that are accessible, affordable, practical and effective. This failure has led to many thousands of workers being inadequately prepared for the work force. They have been forced to accept low wage, menial labor with little opportunity for advancement in the future. There are others who need mental health and substance abuse counseling but have not received these services due to the lack of sufficient outreach services in the community that can establish rapport and linkage with potential clients who need their help , but are either unaware or suspicious of service providers. The deserted are drastically in need of a child enforcement agency that makes the absent parent pay for the support of their children. The ineffective enforcement of the law has left many women and children stranded. These people also need education, training, day care and transitional support to help them make the adjustment from married life to single parenthood. The larger sustaining system has failed to recognize these new kinds of family configurations that have unique needs.

Politically, most of the respondents feel alienated from the politicians whom they believe are apathetic and/or ignorant about their problems. All of the respondents appear to be neglected when it comes to political representation. Their homes and communities continue to be hit hard with high unemployment, subemployment, poverty, poor housing and inferior school systems. The respondents often feel powerless to assert themselves politically and alienated from the political process. Other than local school levies and bond issues, they do not believe that their vote has much meaning or impact on the way things operate in southeastern Ohio. They feel they have little political clout as a group.

These respondents suffer from the devastating affects of poverty pollution and a lack of economic resources (Sloan, 1986). The combination of low income and high costs of goods and services makes it increasingly difficult for the respondents to maintain an adequate standard of living. Many live in substandard housing which has inadequate

plumbing, heating and electrical systems. They lack reliable transportation. They can't afford life, automobile, household and health insurance to protect themselves from life's many disasters such as death, car accidents, fires and physical problems. Their worn clothing and furnishings reflect further their low quality of life. Participation in the recreation and educational opportunities provided by the larger society are severely limited due to a lack of income.

This social pollution, lack of economic resources and political power has forced many of the respondents into a low status niche within the larger community. There is little opportunity for them to improve their status in this environment. They lack the necessary education, work skills and training to work in the high technology industries of the sustaining environment. With the demise of the unions and the growth of the service industry, most new job growth has been in low paying positions.

In addition, it is difficult for working poor people to meet eligibility criteria for training programs. Programs offered are often irrelevant to the local job market and some people lack the transportation to attend these programs. Many of the training opportunities are lengthy and place great social and economic stress on adult learners who are attempting to return to school with the responsibility of family.

The sustaining environment provides little opportunity for the respondents to demonstrate competence and control over their destiny. It is a world in which it is difficult for them to achieve the materialistic goals of the larger society and develop a positive self-esteem.

Finally, this environment, in all its dimensions, be it social or physical, is foreign to rural working poor people making it difficult for them to achieve the necessary human relatedness in their lives. The employment and human service offices are often the only contacts that the respondents have had with the institutions of the sustaining environment and they have been found wanting in their support of working poor people. If the respondents migrate to seek employment in urban areas, they must relinquish their rural

communities and its support system. Without family, friends and nature many rural people lose their connectedness and feel lost in the sustaining environment.

### Intervening Conditions

The intervening conditions consist of culture, economic status, history and personal traits that promote or constrain the action/interaction strategies of the working poor. The nurturing environment enables the respondents to face the changing economic conditions imposed by the sustaining environment and maintain a sense of relatedness, self-esteem, self-direction and competence. The nurturing environment is composed of the respondent's family, friends, church and local community. Within this community the respondents can feel safe and secure. Safety and security are supposedly functions of the sustaining environment, but increasingly in places like southeastern Ohio, it is a function that has been absorbed by the nurturing environment as the government and political leaders of the state have abandoned and neglected the needs of working poor people. The respondents have little connection to their political leaders and government officials. They have been abandoned by the corporations. They are often abused by landlords, welfare offices, unemployment offices and the low wage companies they work for. The jobs they hold are low wage and low status. Without the education, political power and economic resources that the sustaining environment has failed to make available to them, there is little opportunity for the respondents to master this environment and develop competence and positive self-esteem.

Thus, it is the nurturing environment that enables them to survive. Here, the respondents have genealogical roots that go back hundreds of years. They are connected to the land, the hills and their ancestors. Where they are from is important to them. This microenvironment gives respondents a sense of identity. In their small communities, they can still be someone despite not having financial wealth. As more people in the community lose good paying jobs and become poor there is a greater acceptance of poor peoples'

situation. Negative stereotypes that once existed in the community regarding acceptance of welfare assistance, although still strong, have begun to decline. Relationships with significant others provide people with identity. Helping others in the community shoeing a horse, volunteering in the fire department, or repairing a car, provide respondents with the opportunity to demonstrate their competence and expertise. This environment gives people the chance to feel good about themselves. The sustaining environment has rejected many of these people and abused others causing them to question their competence and self-worth. The nurturing environment still provides the respondents with opportunities to succeed and share knowledge, skills and expertise with others in the community. Here they can still be contributors to the community despite working a low paying job and having little personal wealth.

The church is also an important support system for many of the respondents. It provides comfort, security and helps the respondents maintain their sense of dignity when confronted by economic failure. Living a spiritual life is reward in itself for many of the respondents. Faith in God provides continual emotional relief for the respondents from the stresses of poverty and this relief cannot be denied them by the sustaining environment.

#### Action/Interaction Strategies

The action/interaction strategies are developed in response to poverty. They are an effort to manage the affects of poverty on the working poor and their families. The primary process by which the respondents adjust and manage the affects of poverty is adaptation. Unfortunately, there is little evidence that the larger societal system has done any adapting to the needs of working poor people. The relationship between the working poor person and their environment has been one way, with little reciprocity and mutual adaptation occurring between the two forces, as is suggested by the ecological perspective.

After losing their jobs in the high paying industrial sector of the economy the abandoned group was forced to continually adapt to their new economic circumstances.



Many people declared bankruptcy and lost homes and automobiles. As renters, they were forced to move into less suitable accommodations such as apartments, low-income government housing, trailers and older rental homes. They were forced to accept low paying jobs with few benefits such as vacation, retirement or health insurance. Many had to supplement their income with food stamps and other welfare assistance for the first time in their lives at great expense to their self-esteem.

The neglected have always scratched out a marginal existence on the service industry jobs they hold. They have seen the American dream on television, but most realize that they will never be able to attain such a dream under their current circumstances. They have never owned their homes or had new automobiles. These people set short term, achievable goals. They do not set long term goals because there is little likelihood they will be able to accomplish them. They live in the here-and- now, patching one problem after another in an effort to survive. They are continually adapting to fluctuating hours on the job and the low income which forces them to "live on disconnection notices." They are constantly faced with the stress of too many expenses and not enough money. They survive on deficit spending.

The deserted have had to suddenly and dramatically adjust to losing their home, living in rental accommodations or small trailers, surviving on drastically reduced income, and raising their children on their own. They have been forced to take full social and financial responsibility for raising their children and now have no one to share this heavy burden. They are often alone and isolated. They have only a limited support system to turn to in times of need. It may be theorized that the limited support system is promoted by several factors. First, divorced women often lose the support of one side of the family after a separation which reduces the number of extended family members they can count on for assistance. Secondly, many of the women derived their identity from their spouses' position in the community and work force. Once divorced, these women lost their social status, their niche in the nurturing environment. Several of the respondents talked about

how working outside the home for the first time provided them with a sense of identity and importance in the community. They were proud of their ability to be independent and take care of their families.

When the respondents encounter the lack of opportunity to succeed in the traditional way of employment they turn to other means to survive. Here the culture of poverty serves a purpose. The respondents develop a world view which allows them to cope with their lack of financial wealth, material goods and limited psychological resources. They focus on the present, short term goals that they can achieve. They do not set long term goals which they are incapable of achieving and subsequently set themselves up for failure.

Merton's typology (1957) describes the different ways in which people cope with poverty. When the goals of the sustaining environment become unattainable, the working poor people respond by assuming the role called ritualism. They recognize that setting high goals results in frustration and anger when they increasingly fail to meet these goals because of the lack of opportunity to do so. Subsequently, they find that it is better to set lower, short term goals that can be achieved with the resources at their disposal within the nurturing environment. It is important to recognize that working poor people still hold to the values and goals of the dominant society, but may now acknowledge that it is highly unlikely that they will ever achieve them. However, despite this rejection by the sustaining environment they still believe in the political economic system and attempt to obtain their living through work. This is unlike the generational "total welfare people" who appear to have adapted the role of retreatism. These people have surrendered any attempt to attain the sustaining environment's goals. They have resorted to avoidance of social responsibilities and obligations as the larger society would define them. They have chosen welfare as the most realistic course of action, when the few jobs available to them pay so little. The middle class continues to be conformist as they believe in the goals of the sustaining environment and have been able to achieve these goals and obtain a good person:environment fit. For the rural underclass who grow marijuana or run chicken fight

operations, they rely on the role of innovation. These people accept the goals of the sustaining environment, but have discovered innovative ways to achieve them without the traditional job in the mills or mines. Due to a lack of opportunity, they have developed other ways to attain economic success.

The rural working poor remain in southeastern Ohio despite the problems of poverty because here they have a connectedness to people and places. Within this nurturing environment they have forged a strong support system with spouses, family, friends, the church and the local community. The relationships they have with the people and the place provides them with a sense of identity and belongingness to the community that is very important to their survival. For without this, they would be much more vulnerable to the problems of poverty. For these reasons they don't leave, and if they do, they often return to the hills of Appalachian Ohio. There are no guarantees that moving to a large city will result in financial success. Most of the respondents are not willing to sacrifice this support, this identity, this sense of belongingness that they receive from their nurturing environment, for the vague promise of material success in the cities and sustaining environment.

### Consequences

The consequences are the outcomes of the action or interactional strategies. The consequences of these strategies are the maintenance of dignity and self-esteem. In the nurturing environment, people are able to maintain some sense of mastery and control over their environment, despite suffering all the ramifications of poverty. Here, intimate relationships and human relatedness are established and maintained with family and friends whom provide support to one another. In this environment poor people can provide self-direction. In these small towns they are connected to one another and have a well-developed, informal support network that can provide them with food, small loans, transportation and assistance during one of the frequent emergencies that are a part of the

poverty existence. Competence can be achieved within the nurturing environment which results in a positive sense of self. Within the nurturing environment, a working poor person can carve out a niche for themselves and their family that provides them with respect and dignity. Here they can feel good about themselves in contrast to the external world of the sustaining environment where they would be viewed as failures in every sense of the word. Finally, rural communities provide working poor people with a habitat in which they know everyone and can count on them for assistance in times of need. Here they feel safe, secure and have a sense of belongingness. They are able to hunt, fish and walk in the woods which provides meaning for many of them when their external world is chaotic and beyond their control.

In contrast, for those who have left the security of the rural nurturing environment they have often found that jobs were still hard to find. The jobs they did find paid more, but not enough to compensate for the increase in the cost of living. They encountered the fear and anxiety associated with living in a strange urban world and lost the security of family and friends that they formerly could rely upon for financial and emotional support. They found less respect for hard working poor people in a world where people are often judged by how many college degrees they have earned and by how much wealth they have accumulated. Subsequently, it was difficult to maintain a sense of identity in this environment. They were isolated and alienated in their new communities where they were strangers from another place. Many still lacked the necessary work skills and education to succeed in the high technology industries of the cities. In the urban environment, they no longer had the ability to control as much of their destiny and there was less call for them to demonstrate their knowledge and skills about auto mechanics or hunting. This decreased the opportunity for them to maintain their sense of competence. Their children were often looked upon as outsiders or "hillbillies" and they too felt the isolation of being away from the nurturing environment.

## Summary

There is a lack of recognition that the environment for rural working poor people in southeastern Ohio is dual in nature, rather than a single entity. The natural supportive network that exists within the nurturing environment is a great source of support for rural working poor people. The formal support structure of the sustaining environment is particularly ineffective, rigid and inefficient in meeting the needs of its rural constituents. There is little interaction that occurs between the two environments creating a barrier that prevents the exchange of information to enhance the functioning of the two systems. Instead, the sustaining environment continues to function as if the nurturing environment did not exist. If the person:environment fit is to be successful for the working poor people of southeastern Ohio, a systematic change must occur in which the sustaining environment (particularly the state and federal government), will have to become more sensitive to the needs of the nurturing environment to enhance its ability to assist poor individuals who are dependent on both systems for support. Feedback must flow back and forth between the two systems in conjunction with individuals so that mutual adaptation can occur that fosters personal and environmental growth. The result will be a positive person:microenvironment:macroenvironment fit. One way adaptation on the part of poor people results in a poor person:environment fit that can ultimately be better explained by oppression and conflict theory. Three-way adaptation that occurs between poor people, their nurturing environment and the sustaining environment that takes place in a circular fashion can lead to the kinds of interaction that are necessary for systems to learn from one another and make the required adjustments that enhance the quality of life for everyone. If this one-directional adaptation continues to occur in southeastern Ohio one has to wonder how long the rural working poor will continue to attempt to act out the ritualistic role of working? When will they retreat as others have done before them to the world of welfare or crime as they recognize the futility of their efforts? If we are to promote work as something that is good and desirable in our society those who do so must be rewarded for

their efforts. If change does not occur, the welfare rolls may eventually swell to such proportions that the sustaining system will have to adapt to the dysfunction created by a large number of people who are not working. When the sustaining system can no longer afford to support these people, then and only then, may this system respond to the problem. Unfortunately, as it has in the past, under pressure the solutions to the problems of these poor people may be punitive rather than rehabilitative in focus and lack the necessary vision to foster the development of a good person:environment fit based on reciprocal adaptations between the person:microenvironment:macroenvironment.

## CHAPTER VII

### IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Introduction

The voices of the respondents suggests that there is a poor person:environment fit between the working poor people and the sustaining environment. In southeastern Ohio adaptation is one-directional with the working poor doing the majority of the adaptation. If there has been any adaptation on the part of the sustaining environment it is reflected in the new welfare office buildings that have been built in some of the poorest counties in southeastern Ohio. This is the growth industry of Appalachian Ohio and these new buildings reflect the prominence and importance of welfare in these communities. They are a symbol of how the sustaining environment has adapted to the chronic, economic depression that exists in the region. Unfortunately, the sustaining environment has not designed a course of action that would enable it to promote economic development in Appalachian Ohio. This environment adapted to the changing economic times by focusing on the maintenance and growth of a welfare economy rather than one based on employment.

Rural working poor people believe that they are politically powerless to influence the social structure and make it more responsive to their needs. Gans (1972) has stated that the only way this situation will change is to make poverty dysfunctional for the affluent or for poor people to obtain enough power to change the system. The question is, how can this be accomplished when the rural working poor are the most invisible and powerless of

all poor people? They are unorganized and lack a group identity. They go to work, pay their taxes, attempt to pay their bills and try to live life honestly. As a group, they are dispersed throughout the hills and small towns in rural areas off the beaten path, and do not readily come to the attention of people who have the power to change their situation. With the demise of the unions, they have lost their one voice in government and political affairs.

The plight of working poor people raises many important questions. If the working poor people of southeastern Ohio remain in poverty, will they abandon the goals of the sustaining environment and the means to attain them? If so, how long will it take for this to occur? What can be done to assist working poor people to escape poverty and reward them for their efforts at work? Is confrontation and conflict the only way to force the sustaining environment to adapt to the needs of working poor people? Will the sustaining environment procrastinate until the welfare system is inundated with clients and forced to take drastic measures to purge people from the welfare rolls?

This chapter discusses the implications of these findings for social work theory, research, policy and practice. It should be noted that in most cases, these implications were derived directly from these data. However, some implications were extrapolated from these data because they were important considerations for the profession of social work.

### Implications for Theory

Social science theory is a "tentative explanation of phenomena" and its formulation is "The ultimate goal of science" (Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh, 1985, p. 15). Theory is forever being reformulated in the search for a better truth. Thus, poverty theory should change and grow over time. However, a review of the literature suggests that poverty theory has become stagnated in a series of dichotomous theoretical perspectives that seek to explain the cause and effects of poverty on people. Order versus conflict theory, culture of poverty versus opportunity theory, and individual versus systemic explanations of poverty prevail.



Poverty theory has become polarized into two camps. Each theory explaining poverty in some circumstances but lacking sufficient depth to describe rural poverty in all its real world complexity. Consequently, theory's ability to explain poverty is sometimes superficial and on some occasions destructive. Programs have been developed in a piece meal fashion that are based on one theory or the other. These programs tend to fail because they lack the necessary depth of understanding to meet the needs of poor people. It is becoming increasingly clear that poverty theory needs a transfusion: What is needed is a perspective that integrates those components of the many theories of poverty that have relevance for helping us understand this problem.

The ecological model (Germain, 1990) and the dual perspective (Chestang, 1976 and Norton, 1978) are frameworks within which these theories can be incorporated and analyzed. This researcher has developed a grounded theory which attempts to triangulate the findings of this study with those parts of poverty theory that have relevance for describing and understanding the condition of rural poverty. This grounded theory of poverty integrates these competing theories of poverty into a comprehensive framework and describes the condition of rural poverty for working poor people in southeastern Ohio. The major components of this framework are the three dimensions of person; immediate (nurturing) environment; and the external (sustaining) environment.

The essence of this grounded theory is the nurturing environment which the respondents have so vividly described. In the nurturing environment lies the small communities in which working poor people live and work. The communities are characterized by stability and order. People know what to expect. They interact with one another on a regular basis which results in a sense of connectedness that rarely exists in the larger sustaining society. In small rural communities individuals can find meaning in their lives through work, leisure, intimate relationships and in the nature that surrounds them (Frankl, 1959). The support system is strong and there is a feeling of control and mastery over one's environment even when a person is poor.

This is not to say that the nurturing environment is without problems. Martinez-Brawley (1990) has written about the problems of isolation, stagnation, discrimination, and parochialism that exist in small rural communities. These have been confirmed by the respondents in this study. This author also writes about the pressure to conform and the restriction of individual freedom in rural areas. There is a rejection of outsiders who are seen as threatening the existence of the small town atmosphere. And there is the continual fear that if a community becomes too large it will lose its ability to provide people with a sense of belongingness and support.

Nevertheless, it is this nurturing environment that provides the respondents with safety, security, identity and a sense of meaning in their lives. It is where they find stability and order, harmony and consensus. Unfortunately, there is a negative side to this situation. Although the nurturing environment protects the respondents and enables them to survive the problems created by poverty, it is this very same nurturing environment that suppresses any attempts by working poor people to actively press the sustaining environment to seek a long term solution to the problem of rural poverty.

Once again we can see two processes occurring simultaneously. Coercion and power are used by the power elite of the sustaining environment to control the poor of society which can result in alienation and oppression for poor people. The search for order and consensus by the nurturing environment demands that individuals adapt to the needs of the system to ensure its continuance. Thus, inequality becomes an acceptable way of life for many rural poor people.

In the future, poverty theory must address one very important question: How long can this situation remain this way? Shannon (1943) wrote about the same problems almost 50 years ago. This researcher experienced them over 20 years ago. Little seems to have changed since then, except for the fact that the situation appears to have gotten worse. Structural functional theory would suggest that this situation can last a long time, possibly indefinitely. As long as working poor people believe in the goals of the sustaining

environment and believe that they can accomplish them through traditional means, there is no reason to assume that the system will change. The poverty of working poor people is not dysfunctional for the affluent in society. In fact, by nature, the behavior of working poor people is quite functional for the affluent. These people do the dirty work of society and support the low wage structure that is necessary for the affluent to earn a profit. As long as people are willing to work for low wages and make few demands of the sustaining environment, the system will not change because there is no provocation or incentive for it to do so.

These findings suggests that rural working poor people will not challenge the basic values of the sustaining environment in the near future. There is a considerable amount of overlap that occurs when the values of the nurturing environment are compared with the sustaining environment that promotes adaptation on the part of poor people, and prevents confrontation from occurring between the two systems. As long as these two environments share similar values and beliefs it is unlikely that any social revolution will occur or that rural working poor people will obtain enough power in the future to make the system more responsive to their needs. Competition and the acquisition of greater power and wealth are the hallmarks of a political economic system that is not likely to give away its advantage. A cooperative effort to redistribute wealth in a fair manner is not a realistic expectation of the sustaining environment. It is an idealistic, utopian view of the world that this researcher occasionally likes to dream, but must pragmatically recognize is unrealistic. A common saying in southeastern Ohio is that the squeaky wheel gets the grease. In many ways, rural working poor people are the grease that keeps the wheels of the political economic machine operating in the United States. A smooth transition from an industrial economy to a service based one has been made possible by working peoples' penchant to accept the power of the status quo and acquiesce to its values to maintain stability and order in their lives. This researcher is not blaming working poor people for their situation. The consequences for any behavior that deviates from the norms of the sustaining environment

environment will be met with swift and certain actions on the part of the nurturing, as well as the sustaining environment to maintain order. These people would lose their security, safety and identity, at least for a period of time. Without these, working poor people would in all probability be unable to withstand the destructive effects of poverty. It is a risk that may be too great for them to accept.

### Implications for Research

This study focused on developing an understanding of rural poverty from the perspective of the rural working poor people of southeastern Ohio. There is much work that still needs to be done in the area of naturalistic inquiry. Studies are needed which focus on the perspective of other people in the community that influence what policies are developed and programs initiated in the community. For example: What do union officials, business leaders, politicians, government leaders and human service agency directors, feel needs to be done about the problems of the working poor? What is the general population's attitude toward poverty and working poor people? How do they feel about the current poverty programs and what do they believe needs to be done to correct the situation? What would they personally be willing to do to help solve the problem of poverty in their communities?

Future research needs to be multi-dimensional in nature. The use of qualitative and quantitative methodologies should be triangulated to obtain the best possible explanation of rural poverty. Experimental demonstration projects could be developed and evaluated to determine what works. Some government sponsored welfare programs could be transferred over to non-profit corporations or church groups in the community to examine the feasibility and effectiveness of programs that operate with less bureaucracy and more responsiveness to client needs in the nurturing environment. Government programs such as food stamps and AFDC applications could be shortened and streamlined to improve effectiveness and efficiency. Training and education programs could be developed that are

accessible, affordable and effective in providing low income workers with the necessary skills to obtain jobs in current or future industries that will be moving into the region. Government job programs could be initiated in depressed areas that continue to have trouble adapting to the changing economic environment. Experimental migration and resettlement programs could be implemented and community support centers organized to support poor people making the transition from a rural to an urban environment to obtain employment. All of these programs will require an evaluation component and should only be continued if proven effective.

Historical research may have utility for solving today's problems. A critical examination of depression era programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps and Works Progress Administration projects may help provide policy makers with solutions to the problem of rural poverty in areas similar to southeastern Ohio.

Longitudinal research that studies the impact of poverty on rural working poor families over the course of time are needed. How does their income fluctuate? How many different jobs do they hold over the course of five years? What percentage escape poverty? How do they do it? How often do they utilize welfare assistance and what programs do they most often rely upon? How long do they stay attached and committed to the value structure of the larger system? If they become alienated from the values of the dominant society, what causes this to occur? These are just some of the many questions that can only be answered by a more longitudinally based research design.

Surveys need to be conducted to ascertain the attitudes and beliefs of the general public and politicians on poverty. Larger cross sections of working poor people need to be identified to ascertain their status, attitudes and beliefs about poverty to increase the generalizability of these findings.

Research needs to be conducted to develop the technology necessary to burn high sulfur coal safely and efficiently with the goals of preserving the nation's oil supplies and reducing its dependence on overseas oil.

Finally, this study focused on understanding the rural working poor and their nurturing environment. It is time that ethnographic studies were conducted to determine the culture of the middle and upper class. There has been much focus on the lower classes of society, but many insights about poverty could be obtained if we knew more about those who hold the economic and political power of our society and how this affects the poor. The culture of the wealthy may have as much, or more to tell us about poverty than the culture of the poor, for it is they who hold the power and influence the sustaining environment and its relationship to the working poor's nurturing environment. A most important question may then be answered: What does the sustaining environment have to gain from the maintenance of poverty? An answer to this question could be vital in the quest to promote equality and distributive justice throughout the United States.

#### Implications for Social Policy

Interest in the problems of Appalachia has declined in recent years with the demise of the War on Poverty and reduction in the funding of its programs (Daniel, 1985-86). The recent war in the Middle East has drawn attention away from U.S. domestic concerns and has made it especially difficult to rally political support for social problems such as rural poverty. This is not unlike the phenomena that occurred after World War II in southeastern Ohio. Shannon (1943) states:

'What have we got to fight for?' is the most stinging rebuke to our imperfect democracy ever uttered or thought by many who suffer from its economic and social inequalities. It is imperative that the still unmet needs of America's disadvantaged citizens should not be lost sight of in the general preoccupation with winning the war. Indeed, whatever the outcome of the military struggle against facism abroad, it will profit us nothing if we fail to win the fight for democracy at home. (p. 49)

The problem of poverty in southeastern Ohio continues to deepen and become more entrenched with each passing year. The state ignores the counties, the counties ignore each other and often the small towns and villages fight with one another over limited resources. County commissioners are often selected because they are popular, but lack the necessary

education, knowledge and skills to successfully manage the affairs of county government. They often argue among themselves and through this destructive process local government becomes paralyzed. No coherent plan has been developed to rectify the problems of the region. And the problems continue to mount much as they did 50 years ago. Shannon (1943) states:

...it is a matter of critical concern to the people of Ohio that for more than a decade the state government has followed a policy of letting the problems in this area drift. There has been little disposition to recognize the necessity for intelligent and far-reaching social planning to attack the basic problems of the counties of Southeastern Ohio as a unit. Southeastern Ohio today is a case study in our planless society. (p.49)

Gilbert and Specht (1974) define policy as a "plan of action." Dye (1987) states that "Public policy is whatever governments choose to do or not to do" (p. 2). And while laws do sometimes define a course of action to address a particular social problem, "the law itself is not policy; it depends on how it is interpreted and by whom" (Palumbo, 1988, p.9).

Document analysis and interviews with the respondents suggests that Appalachian Ohio is a region that lacks a plan of action. The state of Ohio continues to ignore the plight of the region and there is no evidence of any formal policy being established to meet the needs of rural poor people. Following Dye's definition of public policy, one might argue that the state government's policy for southeastern Ohio is to do nothing about the problem of poverty. Or it might be argued that the policy for the region consists of the following:

- 1) expansion of welfare services to reduce severe poverty;
- 2) location of prisons, nuclear facilities and landfills in southeastern Ohio that urban, more politically powerful communities don't want placed in their areas;
- 3) establishment of workfare programs to punish people on welfare and to discourage applications for welfare assistance;
- 4) acquisition of land from poor farmers at low prices to expand the national park system; and
- 5) reinforcement of outmigration with resettlement programs that relocate poor families out

of state. Respondents have also reported that they believe the state policy revolves around a desire to turn the area into a tourist and retirement community.

This study suggests that the state, and particularly the federal government, must take a more active role in the development of a comprehensive policy to attack the problem of rural poverty if there is to be any hope of reducing the extent of the problem in rural southeastern Ohio and other similar areas throughout the United States. The economic, political and educational components of the sustaining environment could become more sensitive to the needs of the working poor people and their nurturing environment. In recent years, the Republican administration has fought to decentralize its power and turn the administration of many federal social programs over to the states. However, this transference of programs, without adequate funding, results in failure at the state and local level. In general, this researcher would recommend that it be the policy of government to administer economic development and social service programs as close to the working poor people and their nurturing environment as possible. In this way, the programs could be designed with a greater degree of flexibility and responsiveness to working people's needs. However, funding will also have to be funnelled into these communities or these programs will fail miserably.

Funding of a major anti-poverty campaign will have to be administered by the federal government which has the resources and ability to redistribute the wealth of a nation from areas that have an abundance of resources to depressed regions which do not. The federal government may also have the capacity to overcome the unwillingness of many of the rural counties to work together to solve the problem of rural poverty. Federal requirements for inter-county cooperation (such as funding stipulations that require it), may be necessary to foster region wide economic development and to overcome the parochial concerns of each county that may become barriers to economic development in southeastern Ohio. Consultants from the federal level may also be needed to assist local administrators in applying for and developing projects for their communities. Many of the local



politicians, county and village administrators lack the knowledge, skills and resources to successfully apply for federal grants and to develop economic programs. This expertise could be provided by federal consultants who have the specialized skill to assist in this area.

At the core of any policy that attempts to eradicate poverty in rural southeastern Ohio must be a comprehensive economic development plan that seeks to attract a wide array of different kinds of industry into the region. This would reduce the region's dependence on extractive industries and increase the number of quality job opportunities available for working poor people. The following are some suggested ideas that could foster economic development in the region. Tax incentives and land grants could be implemented to encourage corporations to relocate into the region. Advertising the positive qualities of the people and the place could promote southeastern Ohio as a good place to live, work and raise a family. Realistic education and training programs that are located in close proximity to the working poor people of southeastern Ohio could improve their employability. Public transportation could be made available to all rural poor people to improve their ability to work and attend education or training programs. One of the major implications from this study is the need for migrant support centers which could be established for those who still must leave the region to assist them in their transition into the sustaining environment.

Government agencies such as human service and employment offices could do a better job of educating poor people about the services they provide in a non-degrading fashion. They could become more empathetic and concerned about the needs of their clients. Public relations campaigns could address the causes and consequences of poverty for families. Popular film and sports stars could be used to improve the general public's understanding of poverty, to reduce the stigma about services, to improve citizen participation in existing programs, and to increase public support and involvement in efforts to alleviate this condition. Eligibility criteria for currently existing social programs such as medicaid and training programs could be broadened to include low income people

who live on poverty level wages. All levels of government could reduce the large amount of complex bureaucracy that surrounds federal and state assistance programs. Application procedures could be shortened and simplified so county officials and agency directors can more efficiently develop projects and obtain funding that help working poor people and their families.

The welfare system could become more supportive of working poor people by broadening their eligibility criteria, lengthening transitional support between jobs, increasing the amount of property and wealth people may own to receive benefits in emergency situations where they become unexpectedly unemployed. People who work could be allowed to keep a greater amount of their income when receiving welfare assistance and to purchase cleaning supplies with their food stamps. Other means could be devised to enable poor people to purchase food and low-income lunches without stamps or tickets which readily identify and stigmatize them as welfare recipients. Possibly, people could be given a cash allowance to purchase food and lunches and only be required to use stamps and tickets if they prove themselves to be incapable of managing their resources responsibly. Responsible behavior would be rewarded with greater dignity and respect.

There is a major need for a comprehensive health care policy in the United States. Low-income people with no medical insurance are in drastic need of government or corporate provided health insurance coverage. Health insurance that provides coverage for regular, free physical exams and preventive medicine is especially needed to reduce long term, chronic or catastrophic illnesses in working poor families. Without affordable health insurance, it is becoming increasingly difficult for working poor families without coverage to justify working.

A poor people's credit union could be established to provide working poor people with funds for rental assistance, the purchase or repair of automobiles and appliances, and to prevent the disconnection of utilities. Also, low income loans are needed to help working poor people purchase their own home.

Education and recreation programs could be created to provide the children of working poor families with the opportunity to explore and participate in academic, athletic and extra curricular activities at the local, state and national level. Participation in these programs would not be limited by one's ability to pay. These programs could improve the self-esteem and self-confidence of children who are reared in low-income families and expose them to the many possibilities in life.

In conclusion, social workers can advocate for the rights of working poor people and become politically active to improve the sustaining environment's responsiveness to their needs. They can take an active role in educating legislators about the needs of the rural working poor and lobby for legislation that promotes work and supports people who earn low-incomes on their jobs. For example, environmental regulations and requirements could be reexamined and possibly relaxed to provide time for policy makers to better understand the overall impact of this legislation on working people and to prevent the growth of the working poor population. Finally, social workers can work to improve and enhance the fit between the nurturing and sustaining environment, to insure that the sustaining system participates in the mutual adaptational process with individuals in the economic, health, political and educational arenas.

#### Implications for Social Work Practice

The dual perspective can assist social workers in more accurately defining the causes of rural poverty. This perspective helps insure that problems are analyzed from the three dimensions of the person, who lives within the culture of the nurturing environment, which is embedded within a sustaining environment. It can prevent social workers from analyzing the clients' problem from a single perspective that focuses on the individual and frequently leads to blaming the victim for their difficulties. It also suggests that social workers and their agencies become more actively involved in the nurturing and sustaining

environment to increase their clients' opportunities and to improve their quality of life.

While social work has historically prided itself on conducting outreach into communities, practitioners have increasingly become anchored to their desks and lost sight of what is occurring in the dual environments that surround them and their clients. Initially, functioning out of a dual perspective may be a more challenging and complicated form of practice, but it can ultimately provide the practitioner with more resources to effect positive change in the quest for a better person:environment fit.

The dual perspective requires the practitioner to develop a greater awareness of poor people's immediate culture. It also makes it necessary for social workers to develop an understanding of the client's sustaining system and how it does or does not enhance the client's ability to function in this outer world.

The ecological perspective provides service providers with an understanding of the qualities that should be present in a person's life to elicit a good person:environment fit. When assessing a client's relationship with his or her dual environments, the social worker should ask themselves: How does this interaction enhance or inhibit the growth of the individual's human relatedness, competence, self-direction and self-esteem?

According to this theory, poverty programs should improve poor persons' connectedness with other people in their immediate and external environments e.g., family, friends, church, work place, welfare or government office. They should be made to feel apart of the nurturing community in which they live and the sustaining environment in which they are embedded. Poor people should be given the opportunity to demonstrate their competence and worth through work, leisure, relationships and community involvement. They should be empowered with the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise to control their surrounding environment and to improve their family's situation. If they are able to establish relationships with others in both the sustaining as well as the nurturing environment, experience acts of competence, and obtain the power to cope with their internal fears and their external problems caused by situational difficulties such as

unemployment and poverty, they could then be able to develop and/or maintain a positive self-esteem. The key for most working poor people will be to improve their interaction with the sustaining environment to make this environment more compatible with the nurturing environment increasing the congruence between the two systems. When both environments more accurately reflect the needs of poor people they will then be capable of developing an identity that is singular and more unified. Their niche and status in society will be more secure, and firmly rooted in the larger society's culture, creating a continuity across both environments that reduces the anxiety and problems created by living in two worlds simultaneously. When poor people can feel that they play a greater role in the sustaining environment they will not have to feel like they are visitors in a strange, foreign land.

These findings suggests that other actions can be taken by social workers to enhance the person:environment fit. Social workers could make better use of the resources of the natural support network of the nurturing environment in rural areas. The ability of family and friends to provide clients with financial, material and emotional support is extensive. This is not to say that government apathy should be encouraged by placing the responsibility of caring for the poor solely on the shoulders of poor people and their families. Long term, systemic solutions to rural poverty will have to come from federal government intervention because the local nurturing environment and poor individuals do not have the necessary resources and power to eradicate poverty. However, poor families are quite resilient and efficient in providing immediate aid to one another in times of need and these resources can be utilized by the social worker.

Social workers could become more actively involved in conducting outreach into the community, to improve their knowledge of the nurturing community's resources and to establish rapport with rural clients to insure that they are aware of services. The rural working poor are particularly reluctant to utilize public social services and may need encouragement to participate in these programs. Social workers could advocate on behalf

of working poor people to obtain health care for uninsured clients and play an active role in the establishment of low-cost medical clinics to improve poor people's access to quality health care. Day care programs could be established for working poor people, particularly divorced women who need to work outside the home to earn a living and may lack the necessary social supports to care for their children.

Public education campaigns could be developed that identify the psychological and physical effects of poverty on working poor families that may lead to anxiety, depression and physical illness caused by the psychosocial stress of poverty. Poor people and the public could be educated about the counseling services that are available to them to reduce the stigma attached to these services. Some working poor people suffer from mental illness, post-traumatic stress disorder and substance abuse. Many of these people are also reluctant to use public social services. Social workers could conduct outreach and establish linkages with members of the nurturing environment to increase the utilization of the services in their agencies so these people may be helped with these problems which are often exacerbated by their situational difficulties.

These findings suggest a greater need for social workers to develop an understanding of rural working poor people's religious faith. They could meet with clergy to establish a common ground where each can join forces to improve the relationship between religious and government sponsored social services. The separation between church (which represents the nurturing environment), and state (which represents the sustaining environment), is dysfunctional to the successful fit of the person in the environment. There are some social services that may be better provided by religious organizations who have a closer, more trusting relationship with the working poor. Or, social workers may be assigned to churches in the community to improve access, understanding and utilization of welfare, unemployment and health services.

Finally, social workers need to understand the importance of the culture of poverty traits for helping working poor people survive the rigors of poverty. They can develop an

understanding of the strengths of this world view for working poor people and at the same time, work to abolish the myth that these cultural traits are what causes poverty for working poor people.

### Conclusion

While the researcher was completing the writing of this dissertation, one of the respondent's children was preparing to graduate from high school, and in celebration of this achievement they had invited the researcher to attend the ceremony. The researcher was struck by the words written on the inside of the graduation announcement:

Each of us has different talents, different dreams, different destinations.  
But we all have the same power to make a new tomorrow.

The destination of the working poor people of southeastern Ohio and their children may not be so different if the sustaining environment continues to function the same tomorrow as it does today. Power, the ability to influence one's environment, may be only a dream conjured up by the system. Unless political power and economic resources are redistributed, and opportunities increased, the majority of working poor people will not have the "power to make a new tomorrow." Their's will be a reenactment of yesterday. A yesterday that is filled with wasted talents, lost dreams and a final destination of poverty. While the sustaining environment continues to promote the illusion that every individual has the power to achieve the middle class dream, it is readily apparent that this is a mirage that disappears when a young man or woman leaves high school, goes out into the world and discovers the harsh reality that "some got a better start." The plant worker who confronts his dream with his harsh experience of life says it clearly:

If you're not born rich, you ain't gonna be rich. If you're born poor,  
you're gonna stay poor. That's all there is to it.

For the working poor people of southeastern Ohio, this is their future without adaptation on the part of the sustaining environment which controls their access to education, political power, economic resources and quality goods and services.

Sixty or more years have passed and the social economic conditions in southeastern Ohio continue to worsen. It is discouraging to think that the sustaining environment has not acted on its own to correct this situation of inequality and injustice. It is ironic that the citizens of the United States celebrated the fall of the "Iron Curtain" in Germany, which was a symbol of oppression and powerlessness. We should be so lucky to have a wall that could be physically dismantled and destroyed. Our wall of oppression is much more difficult to identify, but just as destructive. It too kills dreams. If only there was a way to magically transport members of the sustaining environment into the world of working poor people. They would learn what this researcher has learned. They would be impressed by the connectedness the respondents have to family, church and community. This connectedness to others is often lost in urban, middle class environments as a sacrifice for upward mobility in the quest for power, status and greater financial rewards. They might learn that their competitive pursuit of the American dream caused them to lose sight of the spirit of cooperativeness and caring for one another that is so reflective of these working poor people and their families. They might see that they have become alienated from those unfortunate souls around them that were not lucky enough to be born into the right social class. And they might come to see that these people are like them in many ways and are poor because of systemic forces that are beyond their control. Through this process of discovery they might recognize that it is wrong to have so much while others have so little. And finally, they might become the catalyst around which major social change could occur to correct these wrongs in the search for equality and distributive justice for all people.

But how do we restrict the conflict, prevent people from taking sides, and get people to cease blaming the victim and see their part in the problem? This researcher would propose that social workers become a focal point for constructive tension and conflict that strives to push and prod the sustaining environment to become cognizant and sensitive to the needs of rural working poor people. There is no reason to assume that maintenance of the system (structural functional theory), has to equate individual adaptation. In fact, for



the U.S. political economic system to continue functioning there will have to be adaptations that occur on the part of the system to insure that people who work succeed. There is much the working poor people of southeastern Ohio could teach our more educated and financially successful members of society. If only they would listen.

If the sustaining environment does not listen and the nurturing environment becomes burdened with too many of the sustaining environment's functions, the gap between the culture of the two environments could grow more separate and distinct. Eventually, working poor people may not continue to support a system that does not provide them with the means to attain "the dream." In this scenario, poor people may eventually become organized as their numbers swell. When this happens, it may be too late to solve the problem of poverty via system maintenance and adaptation. The system may become so dysfunctional and oppressive, that the only course of action remaining may be the radical transformation of the system through revolution which is suggested by conflict theory. We must be careful to maintain the essence of the participatory democracy which was established by our founding fathers, or we may experience that which Great Britain did when they were no longer responsive to the needs of their citizens.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **1990 FEDERAL POVERTY INDEX GUIDELINES**

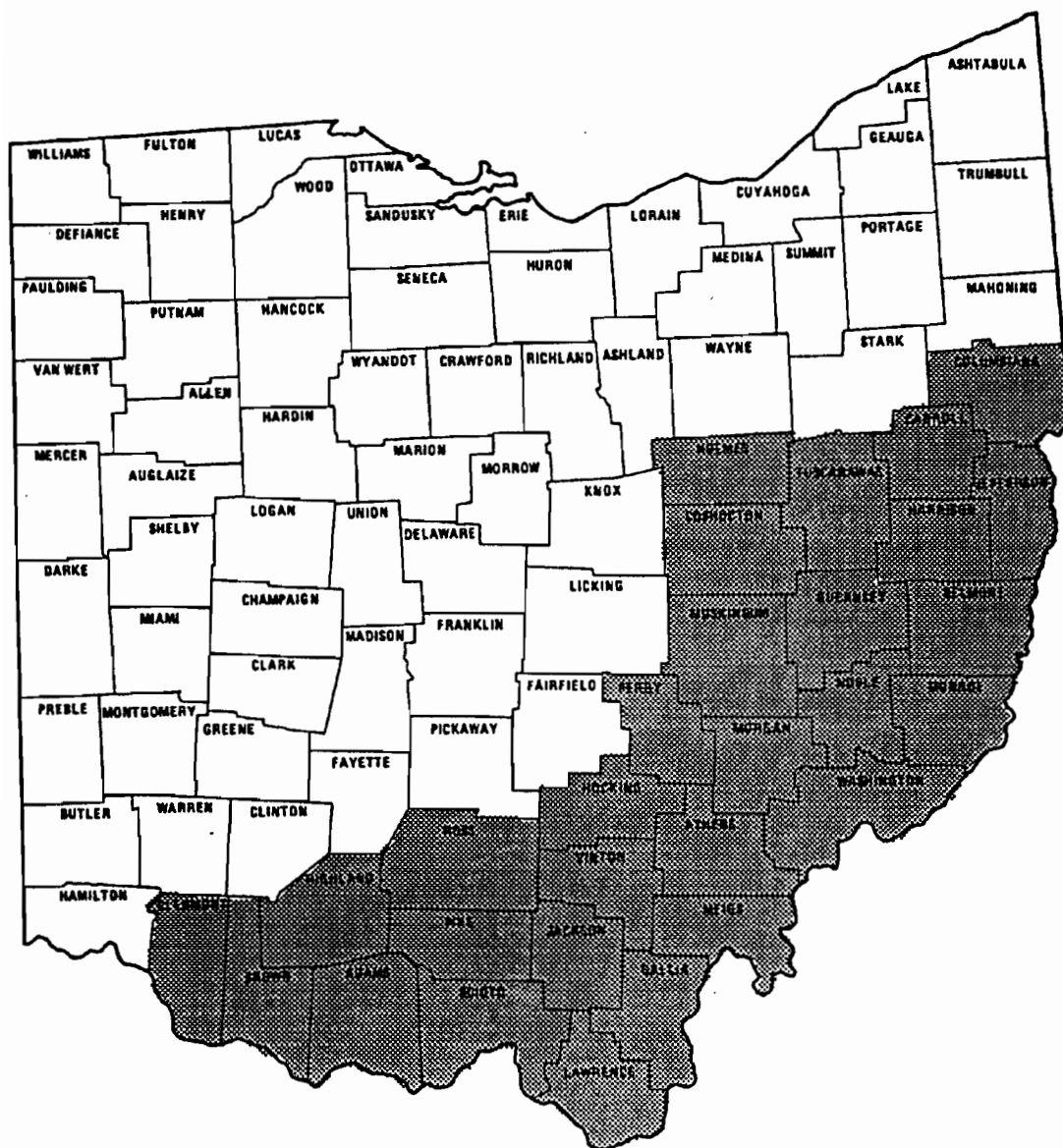
# 1990 FEDERAL POVERTY INDEX GUIDELINES

<u>FAMILY SIZE</u>	<u>POVERTY LEVEL</u>	<u>125% POVERTY LEVEL</u>
	<u>FAMILY INCOME (\$)</u>	<u>FAMILY INCOME (\$)</u>
1	6,280.	7,850.
2	8,420.	10,525.
3	10,560.	13,200.
4	12,700.	15,875.
5	14,840.	18,550.
6	16,980.	21,225.
7	19,120.	23,900.
8	21,260.	26,575.

\* Figures were taken from the Ohio Poverty Indicators (1990) report on page 151.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **MAP OF APPALACHIAN OHIO COUNTIES**



APPALACHIAN OHIO COUNTIES



**APPENDIX C**

**QUESTIONING GUIDE**

<b>QUESTIONING GUIDE: RURAL WORKING POOR STUDY</b>
--

Richard W. Greenlee

Last Revision: January 29, 1990

**1. HOW ARE YOU AND YOUR FAMILY EFFECTED BY YOUR LIMITED INCOME?**

Probes

- How is your family doing compared to the family you grew up in?
- What do you do to relieve the stress of not having enough money?
- How does stress effect you personally?
- How are your children effected by all this?
- How often do you see a dentist or doctor for medical care?
- What can you afford to do when it comes to recreation or vacations?
- What are your biggest needs in life?

**2. WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE MAIN REASONS WHY YOU ARE HAVING SUCH A TOUGH TIME MAKING IT?**

Probes

- What keeps you from finding a better job?
- What is the likelihood of you finding a good paying job?
- What are your chances of escaping this way of life?
- Who do you feel is responsible for you being in this situation?

-What have you done or not done that has hurt your situation?

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### **3. DOES HAVING A LOW-INCOME MAKE YOU ANY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER PEOPLE WHO HAVE MORE MONEY AND RESOURCES?**

#### Probes

-Do you consider yourself poor?

-Do you ever feel that there is nothing that you can do about your situation? Do you ever feel like your situation is hopeless?

-What are your chances of building a better life for your self around here?

-Do you have any special traditions in your family?

-What are your future long term goals for you and your family?

-What are your short term goals?

-What do you value most in your life?

-What is the most important thing to you in your life?

-What is the least important thing to you in your life?

-What kind of situation will you be in 5 years from now?

-What material things would you like to have that you don't have? What do you need that you have put off getting because you don't have the money to buy it?

-What can you do to help yourself?

-Who else can help you?

-What are your chances of becoming "middle class"?

### **4. WHAT SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL SUPPORTS DO YOU HAVE THAT HELP YOU MAKE IT ON A LIMITED INCOME?**

#### Probes

-When is the last time you worked?

-What kind of work did you do?

-How many weeks were you able to work last year?

-What was the average number of hours you worked per week last year?

-How much money did you make per hour?



-Any idea of how much money you made last year before taxes?  
(TO BE ASKED WHEN AND IF THE INTERVIEWER FEELS COMFORTABLE  
ENOUGH WITH THE RESPONDENT TO ASK)

-Did your job provide you with any benefits like medical or dental insurance for your family? If so, how good was the coverage?

-Who do you trust around here to help you with your problems?

-What government agencies, family, friends, church groups or private social service agencies have you used to help you out during tough times?

-What kind of help did you receive?

-Have you ever asked for help and not gotten it? If so, why not?

-Are you able to save any money for an emergency? If so, why not?

## **5. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS YOU DO TO MANAGE ON A LIMITED INCOME?**

### **Probes**

-How do you stretch your budget?

-Do you garden or can?

-Make your own clothes?

-Shop at Garage sales?

-What do you have to do without or put off buying to make it on your budget?

-Do you share babysitting with someone else?

-Do your own house or car repairs?

-Any other ways you stretch your money?

-Are there any ways you can earn some extra money when you really have to?

-What are the strengths of you and your family?

-What are the weaknesses of you and your family?

## **6. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS THAT PREVENT YOU FROM MAKING ENOUGH MONEY AND LIVING A COMFORTABLE LIFE?**

### Probes

- What keeps you from making more money?
- What keeps you from finding a better job?
- If you had a better education would you be able to find a job?
- If you had more specialized work skills would you be able to find a better job?
- How much would you need to make to live adequately?
- Why don't you just give up and go on welfare permanently?
- Why don't you move to the city to find a job that pays better?

## **7. IF YOU HAD THE POWER, WHAT WOULD YOU DO TO CHANGE AND IMPROVE THE LIVES OF PEOPLE LIKE YOURSELF?**

### Probes

- What do you think needs to be done to help you and many others like you in your situation?
- Do you believe it's possible that things will change for you and your family for the better? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Do you think you have the power to make your life better?
- Can the unions help you? If so, what can they do?
- Do you believe that politicians can help you ?
- Do think that government agencies can help you?
- Are you registered to vote? Did you vote in the last presidential election? Does it do any good to vote?

## **8. WHAT KEEPS YOU GOING?**

### Probes

- What keeps you going when you're feeling down?
- If you could do or be anything you wanted to be, what would that be? Is there any possibility that you could do this?

**-What gives you a sense of meaning in your life? What is your purpose in life?  
What's important to you? What gives you a reason to get up in the morning?**

**APPENDIX D**

**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS' OCCUPATIONS**

**LIST OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS' OCCUPATIONS**

**Auto Body Mechanic**

**Bus Aide**

**Bookkeeper**

**Carpenter**

**Carpet Cleaner**

**Caseworker**

**Cook**

**Dietary Aide**

**Factory Worker**

**Fast Food Store Manager**

**Farmer**

**Government Office Clerk**

**Grocery Store Clerk**

**Nurses's Aide**

**Operator**

**Painter**

**Parts Manager**

**Plant Worker**

**Retail Clerk**

**Saw Mill Worker**

**Secretary**

**Truck Driver**

**Waitress**

**Welder (Uncertified)**

(Several of the respondents had the same job titles which accounts for the inconsistency in the number of occupations listed and the number of people interviewed).

## **APPENDIX E**

### **ORAL SOLICITATION STATEMENT**

Hello, my name is Rich Greenlee and I am a doctoral student at The Ohio State University where I am currently working on a research project that is studying the effects of poverty on the rural working poor of Appalachian Ohio. These are people who work full or part-time, but still make less than the poverty level. This research project is being conducted under the direction of Dr. Beverly Toomey who is my advisor at the university. The purpose of this study is to help us better understand the problems and needs of the rural working poor.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. I would prefer to interview you in your home and the interview will take approximately 90 minutes of your time. I will request permission to tape record the interview in order to accurately document and remember what it is you have told me. I will ask you questions about how you and your family are effected by a limited income, the social and financial supports you use to make it, the ways you stretch your budget, and your recommendations of how you would change things to improve the lives of people like yourself.

This interview is voluntary and once we begin you may still decide not to answer some of the questions or you may decide to stop before we are done. Your taped discussions will be locked in file drawer in my office and the information contained in them will be kept confidential to the maximum extent permitted by law. The real identities of those who participate in the study will be concealed during the study and the names and places will be changed by the researcher in the final report to protect the identity of the participants in the study.

It is hoped that this study will be able to provide our local, state and federal governmental and legislative leaders with the kinds of information that can help them make informed decisions about the problems and needs of people who work full or part-time but still cannot escape poverty.

Do you have any other questions about the study? Are you willing to help us by being interviewed?

## **APPENDIX F**

### **WRITTEN STATEMENT IDENTIFYING RESEARCHER**



College of Social Work  
Stillman Hall  
1947 College Road  
Columbus, Ohio 43210-1162

Dear Research Participant:

I appreciate your willingness to participate in the study called, A Naturalistic Study of Rural Poverty and the Working Poor of Appalachian Ohio. If after you have been interviewed you have any further questions or concerns about the study feel free to write me or my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Toomey, at that above listed address. We can also be reached by telephone at the following number, (614) 292-8759.

Again, I want to thank you for your help with this study and if you have any further questions please feel free to call us.

Sincerely,

Richard W. Greenlee, ACSW

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